THE INTELLECTUAL AMPHIBIAN:

AN EXPLORATION OF AMITAV GHOSH AS A NOVELIST

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[...] wanting connections, we found connections – always, everywhere, and between everything. The world exploded into a whirling network of kinships, where everything pointed to everything else, everything explained everything else. — Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CC	*The Calcutta Chromosome*
CR	*The Circle of Reason*
IAAL	*In An Antique Land*
II	*The Imam and the Indian: Prose Pieces*
GP	*The Glass Palace*
HT	*The Hungry Tide*
RS	*River of Smoke*
SL	*The Shadow Lines*
SP	*Sea of Poppies*

Chapter One

Introduction

Every human being is an amphibian — or, to be more accurate, every human being is five or six amphibians rolled into one. Simultaneously or alternately, we inhabit many different and even incommensurable universes. — Aldous Huxley, *Adonis and the Alphabet*

The whole movement of mind in Western culture from the Renaissance to the present — the very movement which spawned the novel and elevated it to the position of the dominant literary form — has been a movement away from dogma, certainty, fixity, and all absolutes in metaphysics, in ethics, and in epistemology. — Robert Scholes and Robert Kellog, *The Nature of Narrative*

In the age of the excessive division of labour, of runaway specialization, the novel is one of the last outposts where man can still maintain connections with life in its entirety. — Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*

Indian writing in English emerged as a recognizable literary phenomenon only in the 1930s. The three prominent trailblazing Indian novelists in English — Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan — foregrounded the idea of a composite nation in their pan-Indian themes: the establishing of an Indian identity, the national movement, the partition of the country, the confrontation between tradition and modernity, faith and reason, etc. If the project of these three pioneers was the construction of a national identity, the novelists of the 1950s and the 1960s aimed at the construction of self-identity. The dominant concern of the novelists like Khushwant Singh and Arun Joshi was with character development and psychological depth, combined with a sense of the alienated individual dissatisfied with modern life. After a brief lull, the 1980s witnessed a second coming of the Indian novel in English, triggered by Salman Rushdie's trendsetting *Midnight's Children* (1981). The postmodern novelists of the 1980s and the 1990s celebrate the plenitude of India, and deconstruct several assumptions about language, nation, history and narrative mode. Interrogating the concept of a totalizing and authentic India, they privilege cultural hybridity, and bring different

languages into a comic collision. The first generation Indian English novelists desired rootedness; in stark contrast, their postmodern successors embrace rootlessness and displacement. Hence the problematization of the issue of Indianness in the novels of I.Allan Sealy, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Rohinton Mistry, to name a few. To explore the new paradigms of Indian identity, contemporary Indian English novelists adopt narrative modes which are fragmented, kaleidoscopic and multidimensional. Celebrating a set of fluid identities, "Indianness", for these new makers of world fiction, "is now a metaphor, a particular way of comprehending the world" (Bharati Mukherjee, cited in Mukherjee, 181).

Amitav Ghosh is perhaps the most distinctive and influential writer to come out of India since Rushdie. The key to understanding Ghosh lies in his double inheritance. On Ghosh's own confession, his mother was a staunch nationalist whereas his father served in the British Indian Army, and fought in the Second World War in Burma and North Africa. He was thus "among those 'loyal' Indians who found themselves across the lines from the 'traitors' of the Indian National Army" (*The Glass Palace*, 552). The young Ghosh grew up on stories, especially patriotic stories of India's freedom struggle, heard from his mother, which he found more appealing than the idyllic stories of his father's life in the British Indian Army. Then one day, towards the end of his life, Ghosh's father told him an altogether different story, that of racial prejudice and humiliation. He confided that "at the siege of Imphal, he had turned away from the main battle to confront a South African officer who had called him a 'dirty nigger'". The dismayed son responds: "Suddenly these stories came pouring out of him: I was presented with a vision of army life that was completely different from that which I had grown up with" (Ghosh's Correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty, 4). Evidently, his mother stands for nationalism, his father for imperialism. These two conflicting strands find a confluence in the psyche of the impressionable, adolescent Ghosh, stimulating his quest for his own identity. It is not without significance in this context that when Mary Gray Davidson, the producer of the American radio programme "Common Ground", asked him how he identified himself, he responded: "I must say, I wish I knew. I mean to me, identity is a kind of, it's really an impossible question. And I never feel at all the compulsion to stand up and say, 'I am this and nothing else'" (cited in Hawley, 165). This

aversion to an exclusive Indian identity is Ghosh's point of departure. In a revealing confession to Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ghosh portrays himself as an incurable amphibian, hinting at the elusiveness of his determinate identity. He claims that "to look for agreement is really futile, since — let us face it — much of the time, it's quite a struggle even to agree with oneself" (10). It would, however, be a mistake to think that he is altogether bereft of any sense of self-identity. Thus on another occasion, Ghosh asserts his position as an "Indian" writer. It is just a result of his "being an Indian" (Chambers, "The Absolute Essentialness of Conversations", 34). He thinks of himself "as an Indian writer" for his work has its roots in the experience of the people of the Indian sub-continent, at home and abroad. Accordingly, "'Indian Writing in English' seems to me to be a perfectly acceptable categorisation of my work" (cited in Hawley, 169).

Complexities and contradictions in Ghosh the man go to make up Ghosh the writer. They constitute his intellectual dialectic and his creative dynamic. He seems to betray his predilection for ideas, if not theory, in his interview with Ramya Ramamurthy:

> I write the books that I want to read, about the things that interest me. I am curious about the environment, about history, words and language. The idea of writing a book where you leave those things out seems boring because these are the textures that make life interesting. (1)

Conversely his confession to Claire Chambers that he is "not a theoretically minded person at all" ("The Absolute Essentialness of Conversations", 29) tends to align him with the postmodernists with their strong aversion to the grand narrative of any kind. He repudiates anthropology as "a kind of hegemonic voice", "an authoritative" and "authoritarian voice" (Chambers, "The Absolute Essentialness of Conversations", 29), thus rebelling against any kind of totalizing, over-arching concept or ideology. Nevertheless, he finds it very difficult to read contemporary fiction because the "relationship between writer and public has become, especially in postmodern writing, very, very, distanced". Postmodern writers, Ghosh believes, create hard-edged, self-referential texts, "and the whole effort creates a very glittering crystalline edge which keeps the reader out." Confessing as he does that "I have done that myself", he perhaps adumbrates that he is a quondam postmodernist. Now he craves "that other form of address, that intimacy which writing creates. That form of communion which one used to

discover in novels" (Silva and Tickell, 221). He seems to have achieved what he aims for. Krishna Sen, for instance, applauds Ghosh for the "dramatic immediacy of his scenes that make the reader feel as if she were present at the enactment" (vi). The most effective way to establish intimacy between the novelist and the reader is to portray the characters from within, to present their subjective lives from their points of view. Anyway Ghosh sets enormous store by character. What makes a novel strong and powerful, "what wins readers for it in the end", holds Ghosh, "is the same: story — whether it is a historical novel or whether it is any kind of novel, it is the characters, the emotions" (Vijay Kumar, 101). Like any sensitive, serious artist, Ghosh is more interested in the meaning of an event than in the event itself. He makes this explicit in his comment on *The Shadow Lines*: "It became a book not about any one event but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who live through them" (*The Imam and the Indian*, 60). History and anthropology can present neither the emotion nor what the individual characters feel as they experience history. Ghosh writes novels because novels can synthesize geology, history, personal relations, and emotion: "Novels can tell us about politics, geology, finance, and about individuals, along with their pain and suffering, and the ways the world has impacted them" (Branagan, 5). That is why the purely psychological novel finds no favour with him. It is an article of faith with him that "[t]he novel is the most ambitious form of creative endeavour and should not flinch from looking at the world in its completeness and diversity" (Branagan, 5). Krishna Sen captures the multidimensionality of Ghosh's novel when she observes that his "endeavour is always to situate a specific incident or experience within a matrix of related experiences which, with every turn of the kaleidoscope, offers fresh ways of assessing identity, whether of the self or the nation"(vi). On the contrary, to think of "female empowerment" as Ghosh's major concern in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, as M. Adhikari ("Female Empowerment", 193-199) does, is to indulge in blatant reductionism, which is altogether alien to Ghosh's temper as a novelist. He is too holistic to be narrowly programmatic; he is too protean to be neatly pigeon-holed.

Postcolonial studies, as postmodernist thinking, has an insistently anti-nationalist and anti-statist leaning. Postmodernists, as Stuart Hall puts it, tend to reject all the "great collective social identities of class, of race, of nation, of

gender, and of the West" ("Old and new identities", 44). They view them as hegemonic identity narratives that suppress marginality, heterogeneity and difference. This applies with equal force to the concepts of "nation" and "state". Hall's contention is an offshoot of Lyotard's famous cry "Let us wage a war on totality" (82). Lyotard defines postmodernism as an "incredulity towards metanarratives" (xxiv). "Grand Narratives" like the Enlightenment, Christianity or Marxism are illusions which smother difference, opposition and plurality. Therefore, the best we can hope for, concludes Lyotard, is a series of "mininarratives", which are provisional, contingent, temporary, and relative. They provide a basis for the actions of specific groups in particular local circumstances. Postmodernity thus dismantles the idea of a unitary end of history and of a subject, the basic aim of the Enlightenment.

The nation is a fundamentally modern concept. For Sudipta Kaviraj, the nation is an "unprecedented" institution which attempts to replace premodern communities, marked by "fuzzy" boundaries and intense emotional ties with an "enumerated" and modern national community. The latter is territorially specific, has clear boundaries and must "enumerate" what belongs to it. Hence, "the endless counting of citizens, territories, resources, majorities, minorities, institutions, activities, import, export, incomes, projects, births, deaths, diseases" (30-31). Benedict Anderson defines the nation as "an imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (15). It is imagined by its people and ideologues, and these imaginings are fraught with incongruities. One of these is that nation-states, although historically "new" entities, "always loom out of an immemorial past" (19) as the same entity of united people sharing the same heritage. Modern India needs to be judged from this perspective.

The Indian nation is "not an object of discovery but of invention" (Kaviraj, 1). For Kaviraj, colonialism in India created a rupture out of which the nation emerged as an entirely new historical institution. Colonial borders were drawn up without any knowledge of the peoples or cultures whose lives they affected. Not only did this sometimes result in people with little historical connection being thrown together, it also often resulted in communities being torn apart, internally divided on the basis of administrative fiat. Pertinent here is Arundhati Roy's observation that "India, as a modern nation state, was marked out with precise

geographical boundaries by a British Act of Parliament in 1899. Our country, as we know it, was forged on the anvil of the British Empire for the entirely unsentimental reasons of commerce and administration." This leads her to question the very Indianness of India: "But even as she was born, she began her struggle against her creators. So is India Indian? It's a tough question. Let's just say that we're an ancient people learning to live in a recent nation." (28) Be that as it may, the borders for a nation become all-important which it protects for its own salvation. Herein lies the difference between the modern nations and the older empires. Twentieth-century state sovereignty is recognized by a "legally demarcated territory. But in the older imaginings, where states were defined by centres, borders were porous and indistinct and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another" (Anderson, 26).

Ghosh is not exactly an apostle of the nation-state with well-defined boundaries. He concedes that "nations do matter, they matter profoundly and it's a kind of solipsism to pretend otherwise" (Vijay Kumar, 101). Each nation has its own project which marks it out from the other. Yet the classical nineteenth-century ideology of an "essentialized", homogeneous conception of a "nation-state" no longer holds. He believes that it has eroded at two levels. First, it has eroded at the top, where the rich nations have essentially begun to melt into each other e.g. the E.U., or the concept of the G8, or the West in general. Second, it has also melted at the bottom where the borders between Burma, Thailand and India are completely porous: "If you look at the map of Asia, there is this whole sort of grey area, stretching from the Caspian Sea essentially all the way across to Burma, where no one knows who is in power, who is not in power. It's just small warlords who are in power. So it melted away at two levels" (Vijay Kumar, 102). Hence, Ghosh boldly declares, in an interview with Sheela Reddy in 2002, that "I think we are at a point where the ideal of the nation as a way of organizing society is no longer holding" (cited in Hawley, 5). He inveighs against the very idea of ethnicity as the basis of a state with fixed boundaries: "All boundaries are artificial: there is no such thing as a 'natural nation', which has journeyed through history with its boundaries and ethnic composition intact" (*Dancing in Cambodia*, 100).

Both the nation and the novel figure prominently in Ghosh's thought because he posits an intimate relationship between the two:

> Novels almost always implicitly assume a collective subject: this is what usually provides the background, milieu, setting, dialect, etc. Sometimes this collective subject is the nation itself. Sometimes it is a culture or a class or a "generation". All of these are clearly the sub-sets of the nation — since the boundaries of the culture, class or generation are usually assumed to coincide with the boundaries of whatever country the writer happens to be from.

Then he explains why in India the family substitutes for the nation:

> In India, collectivities such as nation, class, generation, culture, etc. do not have the same imaginary concreteness that they do elsewhere [...]. This is one of the reasons why Indian (and African) writers so often look to a different kind of collectivity, the family.

More important of all is his revelation that "[i]n my case, the family narrative has been one way of stepping away from the limitations of 'nation'" (Correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty, 10). Ghosh remarks by the way that not only this is his way of "displacing the 'nation'" but this is the "case also with many Indian writers other than myself" (1). In support of his practice, he invokes the precedent of Tolstoy and Proust: "I think there is a long tradition of this, going back at least to Proust — and it's something that Jameson, Anderson (and even Bhabha) never seem to take into account" (Correspondence, 1). No wonder he rejects out of hand Frederick Jameson's thesis that Third World novels are "essentially about nation and nation building. I think that's just a load of rubbish" (Aldama, 89). Actually he turns the tables on Jameson by suggesting that his thesis fits better the First World rather than the Third World novel: "In fact, it is precisely the First World novel that is most commonly about nations and nation building [...]. In countries like India the nation as such is still too young and too tenuous an institution to have acquired this axiomatic status" (Correspondence, 10). For many Indians, the nation is a project rather than a reality. This is why Ghosh uses the family as a surrogate for the nation. For Ghosh, the family, however, is not static but continuously on the move. It cuts across national boundaries, thereby subverting the fixity of this modernist concept. This perfectly accords with his observation that "families can actually span nations" (Aldama, 89).

Nations and nationalism are profoundly important in the formation of colonial practice. As Partha Chatterjee explains in his influential book *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, the origins of the nation in the West have much to do with the pursuit of a set of human ideals often identified as the European

"Enlightenment". European nationalism is "part of the same historical process which saw the rise of industrialism and democracy" and "nationalism represents the attempt to actualize in political terms the universal urge for liberty and progress" (2). There is, however, a conflict right at the heart of nationalism which Chatterjee terms the "liberal dilemma": nationalism may promise liberty and universal suffrage to the colonizers but undemocratic forms of government and domination to the colonized. The concept of the Western nations as representing the best of human civilization becomes a way of legitimating colonial expansion. It degenerates into an ideology of racial hatred in the colonies.

In his correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ghosh points to a "profound ambiguity in Enlightenment thought", which actually parallels Chatterjee's "liberal dilemma". This ambiguity was often used, sometimes quite deliberately, to dupe the colonial subject. Ghosh equates nationalism or "blatant expansionism cloaked in the language of reform and political progress" with racism. "Racism", as he conceives it, "is not just an exclusivist or supremacist ideology. It is an ideology that is founded on certain ideas that relate to science, nature, biology and evolution — a specifically post-Enlightenment ideology" (Correspondence, 6). The liberal thoughts of "J.S.Mill, or Bentham or any other 19th century British liberal" are grounded on the idea of race. To expose how blatant racism vitiated even the operation of the rule of law in British India, he cites the infamous double standard in this regard. The putative racial superiority of the Britishers and the racial inferiority of the Indians and hence their incorrigibility justify the conquerors' perpetual rule over the conquered for the sake of civilizing them. Tearing to shreds this sophistry, Ghosh unmasks British hypocrisy. He concludes his diatribe against British imperialism thus: "In this discourse Race is the unstated term through which the gradualism of liberalism reconciles itself to the permanence of Empire. Race is the category that accommodates the notion of incorrigibility, hence assuming the failure of all correctional efforts (and thus of tutelage)" (Correspondence, 4).

Cosmopolitanism or multiculturalism militates against narrow, rigid nationalism and supremacism. As Renato Rosaldo argues, "[i]n contrast with the classic view, which posits culture as a self-contained whole made up of coherent patterns, culture can arguably be conceived as a more porous array of intersections where distinct processes cross from within and beyond its borders"(20). At the

theoretical level, this constitutes the notion of "hybridity" as a synonym for diversity or multiculturality — the once primeval, separate, and distinct cultural orders are now beginning to meet in the context of global migration. Homi Bhabha believes that culture is never essential or innate:

> Cultures come to be represented by virtue of processes of iteration and translation through which their meanings are vicariously addressed to — through — an Other. This erases any essentialist claims for the inherent authenticity or purity of cultures. (59)

From the poststructuralist perspective which foregrounds the "constructedness" of culture, culture is a thing learnt, created and staged. If this be true, then culture is profoundly susceptible to be aped, copied or appropriated, in a fashion that disrupts the claim that it is the specific property or the unique expression of a single community. So "hybridity" is not simply a term for the mixing of once separate and self-contained cultural traditions. It also gives credence to the view that culture is an arena of struggle, where self is played off against the "other". Hence for R.Radhakrishnan, hybridity is "transgressive in more than one direction, de-territorializing [...]. With hybridity, anything is possible for the simple reason that hybridity is about making meaning without the repression of a pre-existing normativity or teleology: in the exhilarating a-nomie between 'having been deterritorialized' and 'awaiting to be reterritorialized' there is all manner of unprecedented 'becoming'" (cited in Smith, 252).

"In the geography of human history", affirms Ghosh, "no culture is an island" (188). He emphatically points to heteroglossia as a fundamental characteristic of Indian culture: "India exported with her population, not a language, as other civilizations have done, but a linguistic process — the process of adaptation to heteroglossia" (*II*, 246). The idea of heteroglossia derives from Mikhail Bakhtin's views on the novel. For Bakhtin, signs do do not have fixed meanings. Meaning is inherently unstable, not the product of a finished or secure language. The dialogic interaction between the various social and historical forces, voices, and idioms present within the novel form best captures the heteroglossia of a given national or cultural sign system. Bakhtin's view of dialogue is conflictual rather than collaborative. With Bakhtin's conception of heteroglossia as a motivating impulse, Ghosh rejects the prescribed anthropological assumptions about cultural coherence and authenticity. It is the statesmen who draw borders,

but people leave the human imprint by creating the melting pot of sub-cultures to subvert these borders. For Ghosh, this dynamic human activity is centuries old: "In the 12th century, people developed a much more sophisticated language of cultural negotiation than we know today. They were able to include different cultures in their lives, while maintaining what was distinct about themselves" (Interview with Amitav Ghosh, "Lessons from the 12th century", 52). In the autobiographical short story "The Imam and the Indian", the narrator discerns a palimpsest of movement and inter-cultural crossings that started in remote antiquity:

> The men of the village had all the busy restlessness of air-line passengers in a transit lounge. Many of them had worked and travelled in the sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf, others had been in Libya and Jordan and Syria, some had been to the (sic) Yemen as soldiers, others to Saudi Arabia as pilgrims, a few had visited Europe. [...] And none of this was new: their grandparents and ancestors and relatives had travelled and migrated too, in much the same way as mine had, in the Indian subcontinent (5).

These interstate travels dismantle the stable boundaries of nationalist discourse and the conception of cultures as fixed and homogeneous systems. A measure of the psychospiritual impact of these foreign travels is, according to the narrator, that one "could read the history of this restlessness in the villagers' surnames. The wanderlust of its founders had been ploughed into the soil of the village: it seemed to me sometimes that every man in it was a traveller" (*II*, 6). For James Clifford, there could be no better image of postmodernity than this conflation of an Egyptian village with an airline transit lounge. As a literary artist, Amitav Ghosh, argues Clifford, draws attention to the complex "roots" and "routes" that constitute inter-cultural relations: "Everyone is on the move, and they have been for centuries: dwelling-in-travel" ("The Transit Lounge of Culture", 8). Kavita Daiya is quite right in her observation that Ghosh's novels "claim a unique position in the postcolonial literature that explores and sometimes uncritically celebrates the hybridity of postcolonial nationality and migration". She further contends that his novels are "interventions that urge us to renarrate national modernity as marked by the persistence of transnational memory and modes of community" (53).

The hybridity of all cultures at all times brings in the idea of migrancy. The migrant individual's refusal to be confined to one place is a radical gesture.

Andrew Smith asserts that "by becoming mobile and by making narratives out of this mobility, people escape the control of states and national borders and the limited, linear ways of understanding themselves which states promote in their citizens"(245). In today's world, clear-cut demarcations or definite horizons are a thing of the past. Migrancy, which is a condition of human beings, celebrates this fluid cultural landscape. Hence for Bhabha, there is "no necessary or eternal belongingness" (179). Suspicious of a search for lost "roots", migrants subvert the "grounded" ways of thinking about identity. Spivak confirms this in an interview: "If there's one thing I distrust, in fact more than distrust, despise and have contempt for, it is people looking for roots" (*The Post-Colonial Critic*, 93). For Bhabha and Rushdie, truth is relative, knowledge is uncertain. The latter has "been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 12). He accentuates the expatriate writer's cultural ambivalence. Because of the co-existence in them of their native cultures and the culture of their adopted countries, they feel self-divided: "Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 15). Rushdie's "migrancy" is identical with Edward Said's "exile". As Rushdie's "migrant", so Said's "exile" enjoys a double vision: "Because the exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation" (*Representation of the Intellectual*, 60). Nevertheless Rushdie maintains that "it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 15). Physical alienation from India enables the migrant writer to create fictions, "not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary ones, Indias of the mind" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 10). Here Rushdie echoes Ernest Gellner's stand that "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist" (cited in Anderson, 15). Timothy Brennan calls the expatriate writers who leapfrog from one culture to another "cosmopolitans"(38-39).

For Ghosh, the modern Indian diaspora "now represents an important force in world culture. The culture of the diaspora is also increasingly a factor within the culture of the Indian subcontinent" (*II*, 243). Reflecting on the "curious nature" (*II*, 244) of India's cultural relationship with her diaspora, Ghosh feels that the relationship is "a genuine historical anomaly". For "the links are those of

culture, but again of a kind of culture in which the most important cultural institutions as we usually understand them — for example, language and religion — are absent" (*II*, 247). He then provocatively asserts that the links between India and her diaspora are "lived within the imagination. It is therefore an epic relationship: an epic without a text" (*II*, 247). The primacy given to the imagination provides an opportunity to the "specialists of the imagination — writers" to "play so important a part in it" (*II*, 247-248). The diasporic Indians carry with them not so much political or social institutions but conceptual systems or processes. Pointing to heteroglossia as a basic feature of Indian culture, Ghosh contrasts it with the British notion of the "colonial": "To be 'colonial' is to be imperfectly assimilated into the mother culture; it is to practice a second-hand or simplified — if not simple-minded — version of it ... the voice of the 'colonial' is very easily marginalized within the culture of the 'mother country': being imperfectly British, the colonial is simply excluded as a player in the mother culture" (*II*, 249). Indian national culture is, however, constructed "around the proliferation of differences." As he formulates the issue somewhat paradoxically: "To be different in a world of differences is irrevocably to belong. Thus anybody anywhere who has even the most tenuous links with India is Indian; potentially a player within the culture. The mother country simply does not have the cultural means to cut them off" (*II*, 250). Contemplating the cultural representation of space, Ghosh believes that India has always been constituted as much by the notion of the periphery as it has been by the notion of the centre. He further contends that this "notion of the periphery has now expanded to include the diaspora" (*II*, 250). Ghosh assigns as much importance to the "centre" as to the "periphery". He moves away from the "centre", but unlike a typical postmodernist does not reject it. The centre is interrogated by itself to lose its existence to the periphery. For the postmodernist, there is no centre, either to interrogate or to negate. For Ghosh the diaspora is that part of India "which is both hostage and representative in the world outside — it is the mirror in which modern India seeks to know itself" (*II*, 250). Ghosh's diasporic community moves around the world but finally returns "home". As a part of this diaspora himself, he too feels "in some mental and emotional way I'm in a process of returning — which will take me a long, long time — and it is currently underway" (The Chronicle Interview, 3).

Ghosh's subversion of the enlightenment concepts of nation and nationalism would tend to align him with the postmodernists. Still he has fundamental differences with them. Both Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger were proponents of the linguistic turn in philosophy, albeit in different ways. This turn believes that since language is riven with configuration — a "mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms" (Nietzsche, 46) — it cannot represent the world accurately. Words depend on other words for their meanings, not on any extra-linguistic source. From this comes the postmodernist dictum that language constructs human identity, rather than vice versa. Heidegger writes: "Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man" (*Basic Writings*, 348). This linguistic turn is quite explicitly anti-humanist, denying human beings the instrumental command over language. The subject loses its entire metaphysical aura with the structuralist slogan of the "death of the subject". In the anthropology of Levi-Strauss, man is reduced to an empty space. For Lacan, the subject is subsequent to language. And in Louis Althusser's post-Marxist theories, human subjectivity is an effect of ideology. Foucault pushes this anti-humanism to the extreme: "As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end" (Foucault, cited in Eribon, 159). Ghosh is not exactly at home in this anti-humanist ambience.

Ghosh belongs with the modernists. His affiliation with them comes through in his "real interest [...] in the predicament of individuals" (Aldama, 86-87). Despite his training in it, anthropology disenchants him because it reduces people "into abstractions and makes them into [...] statistical irregularities" (Aldama, 86). Ghosh espouses the individuality and freedom of all writers: "Artists are nothing if not individualistic and each must, and ought to, forge their roles according to their own ideas and desires" (Hawley, 11). He firmly declares that every writer is "an individual and every writer has a right to define their own role" (*Calcuttaweb*, 2). Belief in the individual's autonomy, as in art's, is modernism's romantic heritage. Since Ghosh is a proponent of both, he believes very strongly that books should be read on their own terms. No wonder he overturns Derridean deconstruction: "One of the lessons I've learned as a writer is that it is hellishly difficult to say anything at all: to me what a book says is much more important than what it does not say" (Correspondence, 11).

What further strengthens Ghosh's modernist credentials is his belief that literature is essentially the enhancement of life and the propagation of human values. Literature and religion "have been virtually inseparable everywhere" "for most of human history" (*II*, 270). He is shocked at the absolute dominance of the "logic of late capitalism": "Today, for the first time in history, a single ideal commands something close to absolute hegemony in the world: the notion that human existence must be permanently and irredeemably subordinated to the functioning of the impersonal mechanisms of a global marketplace" (*II*, 285). He totally rejects this capitalist dogma of postmodernism in his essay "The Fundamentalist Challenge":

> However, the market ideal as a cultural absolute, untempered by any other ethical, political, or spiritual ideals, is often so inhuman and predatory in its effects that it cannot but generate dissent. It is simply not conceivable that the majority of human beings will ever willingly give their assent to the idea that the search for profit should be the sole or central organizing principle of society. (*II*, 285)

For his spiritual anchorage, he veers towards that brand of modernism which erected "religion as a bulwark against the dehumanization of contemporary life" (*II*, 268). Rushdie too describes the role of literature in terms which explicitly identify it with some form of religious longing:

> The elevation of the quest for the Grail over the Grail itself, the acceptance that all that is solid has melted into air, that reality and morality are not givens but imperfect human constructs, is the point from which fiction begins. This is what J.-F. Lyotard called, in 1979, *La Condition Postmoderne*. The challenge of literature is to start from this point, and still find a way of fulfilling our unaltered spiritual requirements. (*Imaginary Homelands*, 422)

Anyway Ghosh dissociates himself from his postmodernist contemporaries by calling himself "a pre-postmodernist": "Still I, for one, have swum too long in pre-postmodernist currents to accept that some part of the effort that human culture has so long invested in matters of the spirit will not, somehow, survive" (*II*, 285-286).

Ghosh's first commitment is to his art. The question that has engaged him a lot is whether this commitment excludes all other commitments. He has to admit that "a writer is also a citizen, not just of a country but of the world" (Hawley, 11). Whether a writer should be a responsible citizen or an insouciant aesthete is the issue that occupies him in the essay "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi". His point of

departure is Dzevad Karahasan's essay "Literature and War", touching on the relation between modern literary aesthetics and the contemporary world's indifference to violence. Karahasan holds that "The decision to perceive literally everything as an aesthetic phenomenon — completely sidestepping questions about goodness and truth — is an artistic decision. That decision started in the realm of art, and went on to become characteristic of the contemporary world" (cited in *II,* 60). Ghosh abhors Karahasan's brand of aesthetics, and plumps for moral activism:

> Writers don't join crowds — Naipaul and so many others teach us that. But what do you do when the constitutional authority fails to act? You join and in joining bear all the responsibilities and obligations and guilt that joining represents. My experience of the violence was overwhelmingly and memorably of the resistance to it. (*I,* 61)

By advocating resistance to violence and rejecting the "aesthetic of indifference", Ghosh is squarely denouncing the postmodernist dogma of pan-aestheticization as enunciated by Patricia Waugh: "Postmodern theory can be seen and understood as the latest version of a long-standing attempt to address social and political issues through an aestheticised view of the world, though it may be more thoroughly aestheticising than any previous body of thought" (6). For Ghosh, it is "the affirmation of humanity" that is more important, "the risks that perfectly ordinary people are willing to take for one another" (*II,* 61). Ghosh thus straddles the currents of both modernism and postmodernism. Meenakshi Mukherjee underscores Ghosh's refusal to be categorized, but she does so with respect to Ghosh's rebellion against the templates of genre (Hawley, 4). Ghosh is too eclectic to embrace a particular ism and in the process stifle all his innate dynamism. He is rather a typical amphibian, partaking of all ideas and isms that are congenial and pertinent to his artistic pursuit.

The institutionalization of postcolonial studies occurred at a time when the linguistic turn dominated both philosophy and literary theory. This set the stage for theoretical tendencies which Edward Said has deplored for permitting intellectuals "an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history" (*Culture and Imperialism*, 366-367). This postcolonialist shift away from the historical processes disrupts the "customary epistemological and ideological divisions between colonizer and colonized" (Parry, 75). As a result colonialism appears as "a mode of authority that is agonistic (rather than antagonistic)"

(Bhabha, 173, 108). "Significantly, 'agonistic' relates to ancient Greek athletic contests, 'agon' being derived from the word for 'a gathering' and denoting '(a) public celebration of games, a contest for the prize at games, whereas 'antagonistic' specifies '(t)he mutual resistance of two opposing forces, physical or mental; active opposition to a force" (Benita Parry, 75-76). The conflict within the colonial encounter is thus occluded. In this re-reading of the colonial archive, the historical project of invasion, expropriation and exploitation is reconfigured as a symbiotic encounter. Simon During suggests that postcolonial thought, which fused postcolonialism with postmodernism in its rejection of resistance along with any form of binarism, hierarchy or telos signified something remote from self-determination and autonomy. By deploying categories such as hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence "all of which laced colonized into colonising cultures, postcolonialism effectively became a reconciliatory rather than a critical anticolonialist category" (31-32). This is what Benita Parry says about the Bhabha-Spivak variety of postcolonialism:

> It is an irony that the story of mutuality now being composed by some postcolonial critics makes an inadvertent return to the narrative of benign colonialism once disseminated by British imperial historiography and which in the metropolis continues to have a purchase on the official and popular memory of empire, especially of the Indian Raj . (77)

Ghosh rejects the suggestion that he is part of the post-colonial writing movement: "I think that's a term critics use, but it's certainly not a term I would use for myself. I think of myself as an Indian Writer" (Branagan, 5). His objection stems from his conviction that "'Postcolonial' is a term that describes you as a negative. I mean, when I think of the world that I grew up to inhabit, my dominant memory of it is not that it was trying to be a successor state to a colony; it was trying to create its own reality, which today is the reality that we do inhabit" (Vijay Kumar, 105). It is because of largely similar reasons that Ghosh spurned the Commonwealth Writers Prize for his novel *The Glass Palace* in 2001:

> I have on many occasions publicly stated my objections to the classification of books such as mine under the term 'Commonwealth Literature'. Principal among these is that this phrase anchors an area of contemporary writing not within the realities of the present day, nor within the possibilities of the future, but rather within a disputed aspect of the past (Letter to the Commonwealth Foundation, 1).

The "postcolonial" that Ghosh has in mind is the one conceptualized by Homi Bhabha. He emphatically declares that "I have no truck with this term at all". He contends that the term has gained immense popularity in the last five or six years, but he does not know a single Indian writer of his acquaintance who does not detest it. More importantly, it completely misrepresents the focus of his work: "What is postcolonial? When I look at the works of critics, such as Homi Bhabha, I think they have somehow invented this world which is just a set of representations of representations. They've retreated into a world of magic mirrors and I don't think anyone can write from that sort of position" (Silva and Tickell, 214-215). He makes his repudiation of the "agonistic" or "reconciliatory" strand in postcolonial studies quite explicit in his letter to Dipesh Chakraborty: "the unintended effect of concentrating solely on the 'persuasive' and discursive aspects of the Raj is that it sometimes makes colonialism itself invisible, as though all that had happened was a consensual exchange of ideas between equals"(11). Despite all his disavowal, Janet de Neefe clubs Ghosh with the postcolonial writers: "A winner of numerous literary awards, it is no wonder that he has been described as 'one of the most sympathetic postcolonial voices' to be heard today" (1). Likewise Rama Kundu believes that Ghosh's novels "represent a fresh trend in today's postcolonial literature" (175). Shubha Tiwari throws to the winds all linguistic and critical precision when she observes in the same breath that "[c]olonisation, recolonisation, neo colonisation and decolonisation are recurring thoughts in Ghosh's work."(3). On the contrary, John C. Hawley holds that "Ghosh seeks to approach the topic (postcoloniality) from a new perspective that does not privilege the colonizer by accepting the manichean definitions of West and East" (17). Widening the perspective further John Skinner thinks that Ghosh's concern is "not only with colonizer and colonized, but with both historical and contemporary relations between different colonized groups. Not so much 'the empire writes back', then, as 'the empire writes home'" (cited in Hawley, 17). All in all, perhaps Ghosh would like to be called an anticolonial rather than a postcolonial.

Colonialism wins its great victories not only because of its military and technological prowess but also because of its cultural appropriation. It creates secular hierarchies incompatible with the traditional order. By passing colonialism off as a civilizing mission, the colonizers dupe the colonized. Carrying a certain

cultural baggage, the colonial system perpetuates itself by inducing the colonized to accept new social norms and cognitive categories. Unnoticed and hence unchallenged, these are instruments of oppression and dominance. Under the cloak of a civilizing mission, the colonial system persuades the colonized to internalize its logic and absorb its values. By responding to the fresh opportunities provided by the colonizer, the colonized actively participates in his own oppression, thereby, corroding his own self. The colonized is thus a participant in a "moral and cognitive venture against oppression" (Nandy, xiv). By making choices, he becomes a self-destructive co-victim. This is "the intimate enemy" position which moulds one's interiority and also corrodes one from within, resulting in the loss of one's self. "This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies" argues Nandy "and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all"(xi). The inevitable result is the thorough Westernization and modernization of the colonized. Complete surrender to the technological superiority of Western modernity and wholesale rejection of local cultures pain the anthropologist Ghosh in "The Imam and the Indian". The Imam, one of the last repositories of traditional medical lore, is now convinced that his own healing powers are worthless in the face of modern Western knowledge. Such is the unquestioning acceptance of his own inferiority that his medicines are "as discredited in his own eyes as they were in his clients' [...] he bitterly regretted his inherited association with the relics of the past" (*II*, 4). He is now learning "the art of mixing and giving injections" (*II*, 4). The self-abased Imam locates the West's superiority in its destructive power: "'They're not an ignorant people. They're advanced, they're educated, they have science, they have guns and tanks and bombs'" (*II*, 10). The provoked Ghosh retorts: "'We have guns and tanks and bombs [...] we've even had a nuclear explosion. You won't be able to match that in a hundred years'" (*II*, 10-11). Recognizing the irony of the situation, he sees himself and the Imam as "delegates from two superseded civilizations vying with each other to lay claim to the violence of the West." The two between them show in action the ubiquity of the Eurocentrism of the colonized. Such is the universality of the language of power "that even for him, a man of God, and for me, a student of the 'humane' sciences" continues Ghosh, "they had usurped the place of all other languages of argument"(*II*, 11). Ethics and divine sanction have nothing to do with power. While "non-Western" and sometimes "anti-Western"

views "involve an emphatic seeking of independence from colonial dominance" explains Amartya Sen, "they are, in fact, thoroughly foreign-dependent — in a negative and contrary form. The dialectics of the captivated mind can lead to a deeply biased and parasitically reactive self-perception" (*The Argumentative Indian*, 91). Thus the colonial masters of yesterday, concludes Sen, continue to exert an enormous influence on the postcolonial mind today.

The concept of modernity is very important to the emergence of colonial discourse. Modernity is fundamentally about conquest, "the imperial regulation of land, the discipline of the soul, and the creation of truth" (Turner, 4). The emergence of modernity is coterminous with the emergence of imperialism and of Euro-centrism. Europe has constructed itself as "modern", and has conceived the non-West as "pre-historical", "pre-civilized" and "static". Modernity has thus spawned colonialism, supremacism and racism. While the colonizers have denigrated the "native" cultures and silenced the "native" voices, the colonized in response has contested the colonial representations and reclaimed the validity and integrity of "native cultures". The colonizers boast of their all-round progress and of achievements especially in the standard of living and in health care. Conversely Aime Cesaire highlights the depredations they cause:

> I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures, trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out (21-22).

These silencing or subalternizing propensities of colonialist representations are often evident in elite representations within the colonized. Subaltern Studies affirm the notion of resistance to elite domination and re-direct attention to the disenfranchised sectors of society. They insist that the "reclamation of tradition and the (re)construction of national culture after colonialism require a recovery of popular consciousness across the full range of its social articulations" (Lazarus, 8).

Subaltern Studies, with its attention to "the small voice of history", is a corrective to both colonialist and bourgeois-nationalist historiography. The discipline of history is one way of remembering the past. For the mainstream historian, the subaltern past is a genuinely dead object. Moreover, the dialogue between the academic observer and the subaltern, the modern and the nonmodern is never democratic because it is structured against the latter. "Where two beings

are separated by a total gap", believes Wilhelm von Humboldt, "no bridge of understanding extends from one to the other; in order to understand one another, they must have in another sense already understood each other" (cited in Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 109). The endeavour of the modern egalitarian historian is to treat the subaltern past as contemporaneous. And then he is to see that past from its own perspective not as an object but as a subject. That is why subaltern history shapes up as a dialogue between two interlocutors. This dissolves the subject-object relationship between the historian and his archive. In consequence, the nonmodern subaltern becomes the subject of his own history; his dialogue with the modern becomes democratic and open-ended. The writing of history thus implicitly assumes a "plurality of times existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself. Making visible this disjuncture is what subaltern pasts allow us to do" (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 109).

Ghosh has been deeply influenced by the ideas of the Subaltern Studies group. Its founder Ranajit Guha is a close friend of his as are many of its other members. He admits that he shares "some of the concerns of the Subaltern Studies group, because I am from the same milieu as many of the group's members" (Hawley, 12). Ghosh firmly believes that history is "never more compelling than when it gives us insights into oneself and the ways in which one's own experience is constituted" (Correspondence, 1). What relates history to the novel is that history "gives us particular predicaments which are unique predicaments, not repeatable in time and place" (Vijay Kumar, 101). Ghosh's conviction that history "is notoriously not about the past" (*II*, 102) is akin to Kierkegaard's: "Why bother to remember a past that cannot be made into a present?"(cited in Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 109). His belief in the organic interrelation between the three segments of time underlies his statement that "one of the paradoxes of history is that it is impossible to draw a chart of the past without imagining a map of the present and the future" (*II*, 317). No wonder Ghosh enters into a democratic dialogue with the past, and treats it not as object but as subject:

> One of the really exciting things for me about writing *The Glass Palace* was trying to enter the minds of the nineteenth century Indians, [with] a real sense of humility, to try and see the world as they saw it, which is not the same as writing history, because history doesn't tell you about the affective [aspect]. (Vijay Kumar, 102)

R.K. Dhawan holds that Ghosh's "fiction is imbued with both political and historical consciousness" (14). Accordingly he reads the novels primarily as historical fictions. The point to note is that Ghosh has no truck with conventional history. With his profound imaginative empathy, he transcends temporal as well as culturally constructed differences. By re-constructing the past, he subverts the grander narrative of History.

The novel, believes Ghosh, has been "vigorously international" from the very beginning. Yet quite paradoxically, the novel as a form is "founded upon a myth of parochiality" (*II*, 294). Location or setting is intrinsic to a novel. Ghosh's contention finds support in Graham Hough's idea that not only is the novel bound by the laws of everyday probability but also is tied "to a particular time and a particular place"(113). Ghosh points to the paradox that the conceptions of location "came into being at exactly the time when the world was beginning to experience the greatest dislocation it has ever known" (*II*, 294). What he conceives by "dislocation" is not merely physical displacement but intellectual detachment. In order to present his immediate surroundings, the novelist has to have a real or imagined experience of abstraction from them. Accordingly the novel eloquently communicates a sense of place. Yet "it is the very loss of a lived sense of place that makes their fictional representation possible" (*II*, 303). Hence, location entails dislocation; the hallmark of great art is detachment.

With his keen interest in the fragile subject, Ghosh's project as a novelist is to achieve self-integration. When questioned on *The Hungry Tide*, he confesses that he is "very much a part of urban India, indeed the urban world." Yet "my mind has always been drawn to the marginal, the remote and the rural. So it came as almost a natural thing for me to want to write about these aspects, to see in what ways I could reconcile them" (The Chronicle Interview, 5). A syncretist in the realm of ideas, Ghosh conceives the novel as an all-inclusive form. As a novelist, he is precisely what D.H. Lawrence claims to be: "being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog. The novel is the one bright book of life"(289). The novel is able to incorporate elements of every aspect of life — history, rhetoric, politics, beliefs, religion, family, love, sexuality. Ghosh looks up to it as a "meta-form that transcends the boundaries that circumscribe other kinds of writing, rendering

meaningless the usual workaday distinctions between historian, journalist, anthropologist, etc."(*Asia Source*,2). There are no limits to the novel as a form. For the eclectic Ghosh, it is not necessarily fictional; rather "it overarches fiction, and non-fiction, and history, the present, the past" (Chambers, "The Absolute Essentialness of Conversations", 32). Thus the hallmark of Amitav Ghosh, both as thinker and as artist, is inclusiveness. He is pre-eminently an intellectual amphibian.

Chapter Two

The Complex Web

The Circle of Reason

There is nothing on earth, nothing in heaven that is not the product of the three gunas. — Krishna in *The Bhagavad-Gita*

We cannot overlook the extraordinary increase of the global gap between the rich and the poor in the era of free-market fundamentalism. — Eric Hobsbawm, *The New Century*

Truth that appeals to the testimony of the senses may satisfy reason, but it offers nothing that stirs our feelings and expresses them by giving a meaning to human life. Yet it is most often feeling that is decisive in matters of good and evil, and if feeling does not come to the aid of reason, the latter is usually powerless. — C.G. Jung, *Modern Man In Search Of A Soul*

Amitav Ghosh's debut novel *The Circle of Reason* (1986) won the Prix Medici Etranger, one of France's top literary awards; it was also hailed as a Notable Book of the Year (1987) by the *New York Times*. Nevertheless its critical reception ranges from total dismissal to near rapturous approval. Ranjita Basu, to begin with, locates the novel's deficiencies in "immaturity of vision and an uncertain control over form" (151). "*The Circle of Reason* is not merely circular", counterclaims G.J.V. Prasad, "but a finely patterned novel and when seen as a whole displays the intricate 'buti work' of a master weaver in the making" (59). R.K. Dhawan too discerns in the novel "the folk tale charm of Arabian Nights" (19).

Like its form, the novel's genre too has generated an intense debate. If for Shubha Tiwari the novel is "picaresque" (8), for Claire Chambers it is "ostensibly a bildungsroman" ("Historicizing Scientific Reason", 36). What for Pradip Dutta "is an epic of restlessness" (39), for Yumna Siddiqi is a specimen of "police fiction". No ready-made label fits the novel, thinks Stephanie Jones, for it evokes a "poignantly novel sense of a 'minor' cosmopolitan community, both constrained and liberated by the polylingualism of language" (441). Granted its

controversiality, the profundity of *The Circle of Reason* remains to be demonstrated.

The anthropocentric world of the European Enlightenment put a premium on human reason as a panacea for all existential problems. The Enlightenment project for example looked to reason to free mankind from the darkness of superstition, prejudice and slavish obedience to religious precepts and thus pave the way for progress. This blend of rationalism and scientism is what Habermas calls "modernity". Contemporary theorists have thoroughly debunked the Enlightenment's millenarianism. Postmodernist thinkers view Enlightenment's rationalism, universalism and foundationalism as dangerously "hegemonic", "logocentric", "totalizing" and "essentialist". They regard the Enlightenment's apotheosis of reason and progress as a mere shibboleth. Things have come to such a pass that these Enlightenment claims, serving as instances of "metanarratives", inspire Jean-Francois Lyotard's "incredulity". For Lyotard, Enlightenment's grand theories about the emancipation of humanity through reason and science are homogenizing and so illegitimate, and are foredoomed to failure. In a nutshell, Enlightenment monism ultimately results in oppressing, if not eliminating the other. *The Circle of Reason* is an elaborate exercise in puncturing the Janus-faced Enlightenment's worship of Reason and its concomitant racism.

Ghosh uses characters to orchestrate ideas and give his novels a solid thematic unity. Balaram is the most important character in the novel's opening section. The other characters ranged around him throw into wide relief his enigmatic personality. An eccentric idealist who has internalized the colonial ideology of Western science's altruistic mission, Balaram projects himself as its earnest devotee. A science enthusiast, his teachers at Presidency College force him to take up history. He thus continues to be a science aficionado without a scientific base. The two disciplines of science and history merge in him to extol the achievements of Western knowledge, the grand historical narrative of modernity's progress and the Enlightenment's notion of Reason's transnationality: "Science doesn't belong to countries. Reason doesn't belong to any nation. They belong to history – to the world" (*The Circle of Reason*, 54). Balaram's deification of Western scientific knowledge through phrases such as "Man's ascent to Reason" (*CR*, 39), "March of Reason" or "Reason Militant" (*CR*, 117) is strongly reminiscent of Hegelian *telos* or the linear narrative of history as the universal

unfolding of Reason. Balaram's analysis of the history of Western science and of the individual scientific geniuses makes him glorify Louis Pasteur as the archetypal, disinterested scientist, "the greatest of all the soldiers of Reason" (*CR*, 109). Inspired by Vallery-Radot's hagiographic *The Life of Pasteur*, his most prized possession, Balaram eulogizes Western science as an altruistic enterprise for the universal benefit of "mankind", as an "answer to the everyday problems of simple people" (*CR*, 49) and Pasteur as its most passionate priest: "a passion which sprang from the simple and the everyday. A passion for the future, not the past. It was that which made him the greatest man of his time, for it is that passion which makes men great" (*CR*, 50). Despite Balaram's celebration of Pasteur's scientific genius, he undercuts his own discourse when he associates Pasteur's transnational endeavours with specific social and economic projects, that of silk and beer, the two most luxurious commodities in 19th century France:

> It was because the brewers of France came to him and said: What makes our beer rot? [...] Who did the silk farmers of Europe go to when disease struck their silkworms and whole provinces lay devastated and groaning in misery? [...] Who but Pasteur? They went to him and they said: Save us". (*CR*, 49)

Balaram's idealization of Pasteur as a lone visionary receives a severe jolt when Bruno Latour in his book *The Pasteurization of France* presents Pasteur as a canny, unscrupulous scientist who converted scientific research into an instrument of wealth, power and dominance: "Has credibility often been converted into capital so quickly in the history of the sciences" (101)? Latour emphasizes that the emergence of modern scientific rationality and imperialism are the twins of the Enlightenment and "[w]ith each parasite concerned, the columns of soldiers, missionaries, and colonists became visible on the map of Africa, Asia, sailing up the rivers and invading the plains" (141). Latour's argument gains credence from MacLeod and Lewis's observation that from "the late 1870s, [...] tropical medicine – its ideology European, its instrument the microscope, its epistemology the germ theory of disease – served the interests of dominant economic groups" (7). Conceived to be an objective, disinterested and truth-seeking institution, Western science turned out to be a tool of colonization and of world domination. The rise of the discipline of "tropical medicine" enabled the imperialists to justify their occupation of non-western countries under the rubric of "civilizing mission". Vallery-Radot's mythologization of Pasteur's "scientific ardour and [...] generous

eagerness to lighten the burden of others" (120) ignores the darker side of the coin. Balaram's celebration of Pasteur's humanitarianism is severely indicted by his friend and persistent critic Gopal who contests the idea of science as a universal, transnational phenomenon and considers it to be a source of power rooted in a particular social, economic and political milieu: "Even Reason discovers itself through events and people" (*CR*, 38). The sinister equation between science and colonialism which Ghosh briefly touches on in his debut novel is explored in a broader dimension in *The Calcutta Chromosome* which is a scathing repudiation of the Enlightenment.

In college, Balaram and two of his friends Gopal and Dantu start an organization called the Society for the Dissemination of Science and Rationalism among the people of Hindoostan. Their motto for the Society "Reason rescues Man from Barbarity" is one of the major tenets of the European Enlightenment. The aim of the Rationalists, unlike that of their rival Science Association, is "the application of rational principles to everything around them – to their own lives, to society, to religion, to history" (*CR*, 46). Gopal, a student of English literature, postulates parallelisms between the past and the present, the East and the West, "between the ideas of the ancient Hindu sages and modern science" (*CR*, 46-47). He contends that the ancient rational ideas were manipulated by scheming priests and Brahmins for their self-interest. They distorted the Hindu idea of God, the Brahma, by transforming him into many deities. Gopal defines "the real Brahma" to be "without attributes, without form, nothing but an essence, in everything and in nothing" (*CR*,47). Gopal's charlatanism leads him to confuse Brahma with Brahman. Heinrich Zimmer neatly differentiates between Brahman (neuter) and Brahma (masculine). Whereas the "former refers to the transcendent and immanent Absolute; the latter is an anthropomorphic personification of the Creator-Demiurge. Brahman is properly a metaphysical term, Brahma mythological"(123). Continuing his pontification, Gopal further asserts that "the Brahma is nothing but the Atom"; "the Universal Egg of Hindu mythology is nothing but a kind of Cosmic Neutron" (*CR*, 47). The Egg is the first manifestation of the Unknowable before creation. The father and creator of all beings, the manifestation of the divine power inherent in the universe, Brahma developed the world from the cosmic Egg. Gopal first equates Brahma with the Atom and then the Universal Egg with the Neutron, one of the atomic

constituents. The muddle thus becomes all the more pervasive. Anyway, by blending ideas from Hindu religion and Western science, the Rationalists dismantle the Western ideology of the rigidity of binary constructions and champion pluralism.

Gopal represents the confusion born out of the encounter between the East and the West. Accordingly he attempts to interpret Eastern philosophy and mythology in terms of Western rationalism. A self-styled rationalist, Gopal unsurprisingly suggests that all meetings should begin with prayers to the Cosmic Atom. The patriotic Balaram substitutes the Cosmic Boson for the Cosmic Atom. He adores Pasteur and his futuristic passion and induces his fellow Rationalists to follow Pasteur's idea of hygiene and wage war on individual uncleanliness. The socialist Dantu has, however, an altogether different idea of dirt: "It is the world, the world of people, which makes dirt possible. How can you hope to change people's bodies without changing the world" (*CR*, 104)? These two perspectives on "dirt" shape the Utopian vision of the resurrected Alu in the Second Section of the novel.

A measure of Balaram's capriciousness is that he can descend in a trice from the height of Cosmic Boson to the depth of undergarments. Anyway the point at issue here is the incongruous coupling in the Indian context of Enlightenment rationalism and parochial nationalism. Post-Enlightenment rationality, believes Partha Chatterjee, is a "framework of knowledge which proclaims its own universality: its validity, it pronounces, is independent of cultures". Nationalist thought also, claiming to be modern, "accepts the claim to universality of this 'modern' framework of knowledge". At the same time, it asserts "the autonomous identity of a national culture. It thus simultaneously rejects and accepts the dominance, both epistemic and moral, of an alien culture" (*Nationalist Thought*, 11).

Because scientists deal in lofty ideas, Balaram presumes that they are literally ethereal beings. Since the Curies do not live up to his image of scientists, Balaram performs a volte-face: "What's wrong with all those scientists and their sciences is that there's no connection between the outside and the inside, between what people think and how they are" (*CR*, 17). In reaction, he embraces a pseudo-science like phrenology in the belief that "in this science the inside and the outside, the mind and the body, what people do and what they are, are

one"(*CR*,17, italics original). The differentia of phrenology, presumes Balaram, is that it resolves the dualism between the mind and the body, an important issue in the novel which is resolved in the Third Section. Balaram's rejection of "research" science in favour of a discredited "practical" science like phrenology manifests how insidious is the permeation of Western ideology in preparing the colonial mindset. In the domain of knowledge formation, research in the sciences is exclusively reserved for the whites. The colonial periphery is a site of collection of raw data, which when analyzed and processed in the European laboratories, would be re-circulated as proven "empirical" truths to the colony. By way of exposing the "scientific" methodologies of the West, the present novel interrogates the pseudo-science of phrenology. Phrenology claims to judge an individual's personality by measuring the bumps on his skull. Premised on white supremacism, phrenology erects the white body into the norm, and anything else counts as a deviation. The anarchic Other, conceived as the negation of the progressive, rational Western Self, is consigned to the periphery, invisible to the Western gaze. This stereotyping of the other underpins colonialism in as much as it presumes "the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instrument" (Bhabha, 70). By foisting upon the Orient the West's image of it, the former denies the non-European other any identity of its own. It is this perverted science which perpetrates racism that Balaram embraces and invites Gopal's sharp criticism for his fascination for books authored by "crazy Europeans" (*CR*, 54). The cranky Balaram who worships Pasteur can descend to the level of adopting the methods of pseudo-sciences, dismissed as false knowledges. The point at issue is that by straddling the dual zones of "what might be conveniently termed science and pseudo-science" (Chambers, "Historicizing Scientific Reason", 37) the institution of Western science implodes its own celebration of binaries.

The First Section of *The Circle of Reason* significantly titled "Satwa: Reason", is a systematic interrogation of what constitutes scientific methodology by exposing the limitations of Balaram's deviant science. From his phrenological study of his college friend Dantu's head and face, Balaram concludes that he has all the makings of a saint and has become a mendicant. The fact that Dantu is in reality a political agitator tears to shreds Balaram's fine-spun theory. The freakish

Balaram, without developing a theory from the evidence collected, tries to forcibly yoke his "rational" findings with people's behaviour. He presumes Bhudeb Roy, his employer at Lalpukur school, to be idealistic and benevolent on phrenological grounds. Bhudeb actually turns out to be an unscrupulous profiteer. The fact is that Balaram learns about Bhudeb's acquisitiveness and secretiveness not from sound empirical research but from locals' reports that Bhudeb is a cheat and a police informer. In an expose of Balaram's fundamental assumptions, the narrator remarks that "the trouble with people like Balaram was that theories came first and the truth afterwards" (*CR*, 13). The phrenology obsessed Balaram mistakes fancy for fact. In this he resembles Don Quixote, laughable but tragic. He finds in his nephew Alu's unusual head a rich field for his phrenological exploration. Presumed to be impassive, the apparently unemotional Alu is so passionately devoted to his uncle that he fights Bhudeb's sons, Balaram's "*alter ego*, his *doppelganger*" (CR, 99). When Bhudeb invites Balaram to read the future of his new born son about whom the astrologers advanced bleak prospects, Balarm deduces that the son has homicidal potentialities. Eventually proving both the astrologers and the "scientific" Balaram wrong, the baby dies of pneumonia. This series of ironic reversals that the crystal gazer Balaram faces in his "scientific" pursuits proves that reason and reality are too paradoxical to be straitjacketed into any straightforward categories which modern Western logic endorses.

Perhaps not satisfied with the denunciation of Reason through a phrenology freak, the narrator culls a few telling examples of unreason from the world at large, and thus universalizes Balaram's systematic perversion of reason. While the First World War which marked the death of reason was declared in Europe an American judge in San Francisco decided that high-caste Hindus were Aryans and therefore free and white. Reason is thus subverted to promote racism. It was also the year in which the colonial government in Canada barred the entry of eight thousand Indians. The American judge's sophistry has no place in Canada. The racist, colonial government tried to produce a sense of national identity through the exclusion and denigration of others. Relevant in this context is Balibur's observation on racism:

> racism always tends to operate in an inverted fashion [...] the racial-cultural identity of 'true nationals' remains invisible, but it can be inferred (and is ensured) *a contrario* by the alleged,

> quasi-hallucinatory visibility of 'false nationals': the Jews, 'wogs', immigrants, 'Pakis', natives, Blacks. (60)

The irony is that the imperial British recruited Indians to defend the "freedom of the Western world from itself" (*CR*, 39). Balaram saw them as "abysses tearing apart the path of Man's ascent to Reason" (*CR*, 39). Reason is thus certainly not altruistic and universal but is used by arbitrary power systems to construct identities and promote differences.

Balaram's phrenological calculations of Alu's skull correspond with the proportions of the loom quite perfectly. He thinks that Alu is destined to be a weaver. The cranky Balaram believes in fate and swears by phrenology; nevertheless he views man as "the seat of Reason" (*CR*, 55). Hence his deification of the Mechanical Man, "a creature who makes his own world as no other can, with his mind"(*CR*, 55). Accordingly, Balaram sends Alu as an apprentice to his own antithesis, the arboreal, instinctive, traditional weaver Shombhu Debnath. For him, Alu and Shombhu complete a pattern. Balaram, a believer in the universality of science and reason, hails the loom as the symbol of globalism:

> It has created not separate worlds but one, for it has never permitted the division of the world. The loom recognizes no continents and no countries. It has tied the world together with its bloody ironies from the beginning of human time. [...] It has never permitted the division of reason.

What Balaram says of the loom is equally true of cloth, which transcends national boundaries and interweaves far-flung countries of the world:

> Indian cloth was found in the graves of the Pharaohs. Indian soil is strewn with cloth from China. The whole of the ancient world hummed with the cloth trade. The Silk Route from China, running through central Asia and Persia to the ports of the Mediterranean and from there to the markets of Africa and Europe, bound continents together for more centuries than we can count. It spawned empires and epics, cities and romances. [...] All through those centuries cloth, in its richness and variety, bound the Mediterranean to Asia, India to Africa, the Arab world to Europe, in equal, bountiful trade. (*CR*, 55-56)

Ancient international trade routes bind the world in a complex web. Ever on the move, the travellers escape the control of states and national borders. As people move, culture also moves, in a diffusing, outward spread. Culture has always been in a process of circulation that crosses national boundaries. The notion that multiculturalism is the exclusive product of contemporary globalization is thus confuted. The irony of the East-West encounter taking place in the East, and the

West's subsequent colonization of it has been quite aptly noted by Anthony King: "The first substantial encounter between Europe and non-Europe, [...] took place in what were to become the colonies, not the metropole; in the periphery, not the core; in non-Europe, not Europe" (8). What is more, the paths of Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo were smoothed by "unknown, unsung traders, armed with nothing more than bundles of cloth" (*CR*, 56). This overturns mainstream history. For the history of these traders is a subaltern history, a narrative missing from the official history. Dipesh Chakrabarty calls for a "history that deliberately makes visible [...] its own repressive strategies and practices" so that "the modern is inevitably contested" (*Provincializing Europe*, 45-46). By calling Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta "just journeymen", the narrator privileges over them these unrecorded traders, who made the routes "safe and tame over centuries"(*CR* , 56).

After the loom and cloth, it is now the turn of cotton. Cotton explains histories, the rise and fall of empires, the vicissitudes of peoples. The polylinguistic history of the word "cotton" spun its web around the world. While Balaram prizes the mechanical man, cotton and the loom, the narrator presents their potential for evil. In order to secure a world-wide market for the huge quantities of cloth produced by the Lancashire cotton mills, Britishers and other Europeans systematically liquidated the weavers in their colonies. What is more, cotton, once the symbol of freedom from all constraints, degenerates into the very symbol of inhumanity:

> The machine had driven men mad.[...] Lancashire poured out its waterfalls of cloth, and the once cloth-hungry and peaceful Englishmen and Dutchmen and Danes of Calcutta and Chandannagar, Madras and Bombay turned their trade into a garrote to make every continent safe for the cloth of Lancashire, strangling the very weavers and techniques they had crossed oceans to discover. Millions of Africans and half of America were enslaved by cotton. (*CR*, 57)

The Arabs "raised them (the Europeans) to civilization" (*CR*, 56). It is an irony of history that several centuries later the cotton mills of Lancashire tied thousands of Egyptians into bondage. The history of cotton thus is a history of imperial exploitation. The asymmetries of economic power thus overdetermine international trade. Yet, quite paradoxically, cotton was the inspiration behind the industrial revolution in the middle of the eighteenth century, weaving behind the technological innovations in the mid-twentieth century. The history of cotton is

thus "a gory history in parts; a story of greed and destruction. Every scrap of cloth is stained by a bloody past. But it is the only history we have and history is hope as well as despair" (*CR*, 57-58). The narrator equates weaving with hope because, as it did in the past, weaving can bind the world with all its diversity, in a web: "Weaving is hope because it has no country, no continent. Weaving *is* Reason, which makes the world mad and makes it human"(*CR*, 58, italics original). It is the novelist's dialectical life vision that informs his orchestrated presentation of the double nature of everything.

The crash of an aeroplane on Bhudeb's school building in Lalpukur further widens the cleavage between the rational and the irrational. An "exclamation mark"(*CR*, 87) from the sky, the incident of the crash can be called an instance of magic realism. Magic(al) Realism is inherently transgressive and subversive in nature. The oxymoronic term juxtaposes the categories of the magical and the real. Zamora and Faris very aptly explain its dual nature: "Magical realist texts are subversive: their in-betweenness, their all at onceness encourages resistance to monological political and cultural structures, a feature that has made the mode particularly useful to writers in postcolonial cultures and, increasingly to women" (6). The mode of magical realism explores and exceeds ontological, political, geographical or generic boundaries. Magic effects are used to "indict the follies of both empire and its aftermath" (Boehmer, 87). The transgressive power of magical realism is a means to dismantle the assumptions of the dominant culture in general, scientific and logical truth in particular. In this context, it questions the domination of Enlightenment Rationality. While Balaram reflects on the strange nature of the plane crash, the pragmatic Bhudeb trades on it. The fact that Bhudeb has had the foresight to insure the school just fifteen days before the crash puzzles all. Bolai-da concludes that it is certainly "more than mere coincidence" (*CR*, 94). Bhudeb receives a huge compensation from the insurance company. The villagers of Lalpukur pay Bhudeb for the scraps. But, ultimately, even these scraps are wrested from them by the "blue-uniforms" (*CR*, 96) of the state as they are government property. The once philanthropic Bhudeb now turns into a fascist. In a rabble-rousing address, he explains his theory of "straight lines": "The time has come [...] for straight lines. [...] Look at Europe, look at America, look at Tokyo: straight lines, that's the secret. [...] There's a time and an age for everything, and this is the age of the straight line" (*CR*, 99). If weaving, with its all-inclusive

quality, is a metaphor for art, "straight lines" could stand for modernity and capitalist enterprise. Against European and American prosperity, the village presents disordered beauty. With his straight lines, the battle lines between Bhudeb and Balaram are finally drawn. While Bhudeb strives for commercial gain, Balaram's reformist zeal urges him to disinfect the village with carbolic acid. Inspired by colonial ideologies of knowledge and culture and to initiate a "new history" (*CR*, 106), Balaram establishes the Pasteur School of Reason. His School comprises two departments, the Department of Pure Reason and the Department of Practical Reason, "abstract reason and concrete reason, a meeting of the two great forms of human thought" (*CR*, 107). Redolent as they are of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), there is nothing grandiose about them. Balaram simply invokes the discourses of the Enlightenment and strives for the creative use of the intellect in everyday practice. His blending of the simple and the beautiful, "knowledge coupled with labour" (*CR*, 109), is his way of countering Bhudeb's theory of "straight lines". Balaram's expansion of his School with the Department of the March of Reason couples with his irrational engagement of power struggle with Bhudeb by dousing him in carbolic acid. Balaram's obsession with his utopian dreams and Bhudeb's with his developmental projects reduces them to a pair of monomaniacs which establishes their complementarities which the recalcitrant Shombhu identifies to Balaram: "You're two halves of an apple if you only knew it, one raw, one rotten, but the same fruit" (*CR*, 141). The duo's sheer hatred for each other culminates in Balaram's destruction.

Contrapuntal as they are, Shombhu and Balaram are oppositely oriented. "The machine, like man", believes Shombhu, "is captive to language" (*CR*, 73). When he begins explaining the parts of the machine to Alu, he finds that the "loom has knotted his tongue": "So many names, so many words, words beaten together in the churning which created the world" (*CR*, 73). Balaram treats the loom as the symbol of globalism; the narrator traces the polylinguistic history of cotton. Shombhu insists that Alu learn each part of the loom in three languages: "*Kol-norod* in Noahkhali, *nata-norod* in Tangail, *cloth-beam* in English" (*CR*,73). In his discourse, Shombhu ranges from the local to the global. Noahkhali and Tangail are districts as well as dialects in Bangladesh, English provides a global resonance. The blending of the local and the transnational results in fusion.

Exploring the history of weaving the narrator creates a counter-narrative to the Eurocentric history of scientific advancement and modernity, industrialization and colonial expansion. Balaram's assertion that weaving is a "living belief" that "made the world one and blessed it with its diversity" (*CR*, 58) celebrates the bridging of transnational spaces, languages, discourses by dismantling boundaries and yet maintaining one's individuality. Shombhu insists on the necessity of more than one language to know the parts of the loom and also the inadequacy of language to describe the creative process:

> A loom is a dictionaryglossarythesarus. Why? Words serve no purpose; nothing mechanical. No, it is because the weaver, in making cloth, makes words, too, and trespassing on the territory of the poets gives names to things the eye can't see. That is why the loom has given language more words, more metaphor, more idiom than all the world's armies of pen-wielders. (*CR*, 74)

Weaving creates a new design to describe which a new word has to be coined. Balaram glorifies Mechanical Man, Shombhu the creative weaver. Weaving defies language and assumes a metaphysical dimension.

A creative artist that he is, Shombhu privileges the mind over the body. Combining weaving with Bruce Lee kung fu, his son Rakhal attaches equal importance to the mind and the body. Rakhal is a creator and a destroyer rolled into one and hence a paradox. He starts preparing bombs for material gain: "There's a war in the towns too. They need bombs. You watch; I'll be rich" (*CR*, 78). The "war" that Rakhal speaks of is the Naxalite Movement in West Bengal. The Indian national space is intersected both by external threats (the war with Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh) and micro-national extremist politics. By mixing tradition with modern technological innovations, nativism with Bruce Lee movies, Lalpukur does not present a stable, authentic culture, but a site for hybridization. In fact, Lalpukur is "churning like cement in a grinder" (*CR*, 76).

Disillusioned with the world around him, Shombhu mourns the degrading effects of capitalism on art and beauty: "Beauty doesn't exist; it is *made* like words or forts, by speakers and listeners, warriors and defenders, weavers and wearers. That world has washed away. Jamdani is only a toy for the wives of contractors and mahajans now"(*CR*, 81, italics original). Beauty is jointly created by the artist and the appreciator, the weaver and the wearer. The ethos congenial to the creation of such beauty, Shombhu believes, does not exixt any more.

Shombhu forcefully raises the issue of subjectivity in perception. Perception is intrinsically mind-dependent because "Whilst part of what we perceive comes through our senses from the object before us, another part always comes [...] out of our own head" (James, 103). With their materialist and unimaginative mind-set, the new rich cannot respond to the ethereal beauty of jamdani.

Within the novel's thematic pattern, Gopal acts as the norm from which Balaram and Bhudeb deviate into opposite directions. Sagacity personified, Gopal acts as the idealist, unpractical Balaram's voice of wisdom. Balaram and Bhudeb seem to work out the dialectic between mind and matter, idealism and materialism. Through ecstasy, Balaram transcends the self at a privileged moment. Denied any such outlet, Bhudeb always remains imprisoned within the confines of the self. The enigmatic, instinctive Shombhu complements Balaram and counterpoints Bhudeb. An artist turned lover, Shombhu is a fearless adventurer. Resisting Bhudeb's authority, he elopes with his wife Parboti. The maverick Shombhu is an eternal pilgrim, ever engaged in the quest for a progressively more perfect life value. With his boisterous gaiety and irrepressible spirit, he is a whole man and a mystic at that. A truly free man, he is above class consciousness, social snobbery, and affectation of all kinds. What he has in abundance is the holiness of the heart's affections. He is the ultimate manifestation of primal energy. Maya's pragmatism contrasts with Rakhal's extremism. Parboti's child feels "better already now that she's with her father" (*CR*, 134). The joy is short-lived because the vengeful Bhudeb prepares for his final assault on Balaram's household. The sensitive Shombhu realizes that his exit will end all the trouble. Having tricked his enemy Bhudeb, he has no other scores to settle. As he came to Lalpukur, so he goes, completing a circle: "This is how I came here – with a woman and a child and a bundle of clothes – and this is how I'll go" (141). He has a bum's non-attachment and spiritual resilience.

For the title of the seventh or penultimate chapter of the novel's First Part named "Satwa: Reason", Ghosh lifts the philosophically pregnant phrase "The Ghost in the Machine" from Gilbert Ryle's highly controversial book *The Concept of Mind* (1949). The seventeenth century French philosopher Rene Descartes posits mind and body as two independent, incompatible substances. In his view, a human body is a machine which nevertheless houses the non-physical mind. Intent on debunking Descartes's mind-body dualism, Ryle reduces the mind to a ghost.

In Ghosh's hand, particularly in this chapter, the human mind is no ineffectual ghost but a potent force. More to the point in the present context are the philosophical implications of the rationalist Descartes's mind-body dualism, succinctly encapsulated by Bertrand Russell:

> 'I think, therefore I am', makes mind more certain than matter, and my mind (for me) more certain than the minds of others. There is thus, in all philosophy derived from Descartes, a tendency to subjectivism and to regarding matter as something only knowable, if at all, by inference from what is known of mind.(548)

Balaram and his wife Toru-debi demonstrate the disastrous consequences of privileging the mind over the body and its concomitants: self-imprisonment and alienation from the physical, public world.

Shombhu Debnath's elopement with Bhudeb Roy's wife and daughter and the fugitive's shelter in Balaram's house without the owners' knowledge adds a new twist to the standing enmity between Bhudeb and Balaram. By branding Balaram's family as "extremists" who smuggle "foreign weapons" (*CR*, 129) from "across the border" (*CR*, 131), Bhudeb demonstrates reason's malleability which can accommodate any logic to serve the interests of the men in power. It allows the narrative the opportunity to explore the coercive practices of the bureaucratic apparatus in a post-colonial nation state and its rational pretensions. Although he is forced to obey the dictates of an administrative machinery that operates through excess, the bird-watching, visionary police inspector Jyoti Das doubts that Balaram received financial assistance from across the border: "There appeared to be no rational grounds to substantiate the principal source's belief that a retired schoolmaster in his village was being used by a foreign-trained agent of some kind, disguised as a weaver, to run a network of extremists" (*CR*, 126). What a representative of a government machinery interprets to be "some kind of petty village rivalry" (*CR*, 127) and a "thoroughly trivial matter" (*CR*, 126), the state apparatus, confounding all logic, considers it to be a threat to the nation. Hence, the local police besiege Balaram's compound. In another irony, the self-withdrawn Toru-debi and Balaram are totally impervious to the external world mistaking their respective fancies for facts. While Toru-debi clings to her idea that the confrontation is all about the incomplete blouses, Balaram looks forward to squaring accounts with Bhudeb. Evidently Balaram is as much a victim of

paranoia as his wife is of *idée fixe*. Knowing full well that he and not Balaram is Bhudeb's immediate target, Shombhu feels that Balaram's belligerence towards Bhudeb is absolutely gratuitous. Balaram's enemy at the moment is not Bhudeb but his own crazy mind imagining things for which there is not the slightest justification. Hence Shombhu's tearful attempt to disabuse Balaram and to save him from self-destruction: "You must stop this: this is madness. There's no reason to go on like this. No reason. [...] You're the best sadhu I've ever known, [...], but no mortal man can cope with the fierceness of your gods" (*CR*, 142). While the clear-eyed Shombhu tries to drag Balaram out of his subjectivity and to open his blinkered eyes to the reality as it is, Balaram plunges all the deeper into the recesses of his self. In the inevitable carnage that follows, the police open fire which decimates Balaram's house and several innocent people. In their mode of repression, the military-bureaucratic apparatus in a post-colonial state is an extension of the colonial machinery's subordination of indigenous social classes as Alavi explains:

> The colonial state is therefore equipped with a powerful bureaucratic military apparatus and mechanisms of government which enable it through its routine operations to subordinate the native social classes. The post-colonial society inherits that overdeveloped apparatus of state and its institutionalized practices through which the operations of the indigenous social classes are regulated and controlled. (74)

In the scheme of things where reason is phantasmatic, the innocent orphan Alu is absurdly branded as a terrorist thus invoking Bourdieu's warning that "the social force of representation is not necessarily proportional to [its] truth-value" (*Language and Symbolic Power*, 227). The fugitive Alu escapes from the clutches of the police and flees to South India where the Chalias, weavers from Kerala, help the runaway "Suspect" (*CR*, 154) leave the Indian shores for al-Ghazira on the rickety boat *Mariamma*.

Displacement and migration, dislocation and inter-cultural crossings are a recurrent motif in Ghosh's oeuvre which is introduced quite intriguingly in *The Circle of Reason*. The people of Lalpukur were hounded out of their homeland by events beyond their control. The narrator feels deeply about these history's victims: "Vomitted out of their native soil years ago in another carnage, and dumped hundreds of miles away, they had no anger left. Their only passion was memory"(*CR*, 59). In the context of the history of the Indian sub-continent,

particularly Bengal, the "carnage" refers to the Partition of India in 1947. Here private experience is pitted against public experience. The anguished memory of the displaced glorifies the past. "Memory", believes Dipesh Chakrabarty, "is a complex phenomenon that reaches out to far beyond what normally constitutes an historian's archives"("Remembered Villages", 318). Years later when "a war was brewing across the border"(*CR*, 59), the lives of the people of Lalpukur were also affected: "their relatives on the other side never let them forget it. Often they were drummed to bed by the rattle of distant gunfire"(*CR*, 59). What is worse, Lalpukur becomes a dumping-ground for the refugees from across the border: "Long before the world had sniffed genocide in Bangladesh, Lalpukur began to swell. It grew and grew. [...] borders dissolved under the weight of millions of people in panic-stricken flight from an army of animals (*CR*, 59-60). Through the idea of the borderline, nationalist discourse espouses the construction and consolidation of difference. The notion of binary oppositions is implicit in the conception of the border. Every cultural system divides the world into "its own" internal space and "their" external space. The fact that the turmoil in Bangladesh affects Lalpukur in the neighbouring country points to the ineffectuality of borders.

There are two Bengali words for "refugee", *sharanarthi*, meaning someone who seeks refuge and protection, and *udvastu*, someone who is homeless. As Dipesh Chakrabarty explains: "An *udvastu* then – the prefix 'ut' signifying 'off' or 'outside'– was someone who had been placed outside of where his foundations were. And since this was not a desirable state, it could have only come about through some application of force and/or a grave misfortune"("Remembered Villages",323). The displaced after the Partition were originally refugees in the second sense. They then settle in Lalpukur but keep on commemorating their native village as sacred and beautiful. The Bangladesh war victims, however, are to return home on the restoration of peace. When Bangladesh actually materializes, some of them return; others stay back in the host country and disperse all over it. This results in a composite of indigens and immigrants, undermining the myth of a homogeneous nation.

While political compulsion is the cause of demographic dislocation, the lure of economic opportunities in the New World of al-Ghazira in the Middle East compels the working class South Asians to become desperate immigrants. The compelling attraction for technologically advanced commodities like watches and

electronic products destroys local businesses based on indigenous traditions. What eggs Rakesh on to al-Ghazira is a "gigantic, pulsating cassette recorder" (*CR*, 183) beneath a small earthen figurine of the Devi Lakshmi in a sweetshop, symbolic of the hybridity of modern India, mixing modern technology and ancient religion. Ayurvedic laxatives, symbolizing tradition, have lost out in the competition to Western consumer products like "sparkling, bubbling salts which dissolved in water or milky syrups in bottles with bright labels" (*CR*, 182). The narrator underlines capitalism's long-standing lure of money, its nexus with neocolonialism and its capacity to turn people into commodities when the migrants on board the *Mariamma* have their first glimpse of the lights of the Middle East:

> through a century and a half the same lights have shone in one part of the globe or another, wherever money and its attendant arms have chosen to descend on peoples unprepared for its onslaughts, and for all of those hundred and fifty years *Mariamma*'s avatars have left that coast for those lights carrying with them an immense cargo of wanderers seeking their own destruction in giving flesh to the whims of capital. (*CR*, 189)

The novel's second section "*Rajas*: Passion" shatters the dreams of third world immigrants about the utopian possibilities in the Gulf and delineates the dehumanizing labour conditions in the region.

In this context, Karthamma's painful pregnancy on the *Mariamma* raises many questions. Her labour has started but she tries to kill the baby in the womb. Karthamma believes that her child would not have any material possessions if she doesn't sign the proper forms. To make matters worse, her child might even be sent back to India. For Karthamma the "forms" are a source of legitimacy for her illegitimate child. A migrant that she is, al-Ghazira holds for her the possibilities of a bright future and material prosperity. She has been convinced that by going to al-Ghazira she and her unborn child will possess "houses and cars and multi-storeyed buildings" (*CR*, 177). To return to India, and so to her past, would be a regression. By all indications, Karthamma has been sexually exploited. She has also experienced the utter destitution typical of a citizen of a Third-World post-colonial nation by doing "eight-anna jobs in ricefields and things like that" (*CR*, 177). No wonder she would prefer killing her child to returning to India. The gullible Karthamma rests her dreams of modern material comforts on a piece of deception.

By providing shelter to the diverse illegal immigrants from the Indian subcontinent and North Africa, Zindi establishes a community in miniature. She relates to the inmates on the basis of both affection and money. She helps them to find jobs and charges them rent. She tells stories to her neighbours and sells them tea. A victim of patriarchy, Zindi establishes a matriarchal community. Her house is for its inmates both "the home" and "the world":

> The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests, where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world – and woman is its representation. (Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 120)

This matriarch contends that the relation between herself and the women is not that between an entrepreneur and his commodities but between a householder and his "family". They are not forced diasporas but voluntary exiles: "When I go to India I don't have to do anything. These women find me and come running: Take me, Zindi – no, me, Zindi-didi" (*CR*, 181). These girls have a wonderful reputation in al-Ghazira for being both "reliable" and "hard-working". Zindi finds them jobs, and they pay her a little in return. But this is not a business, "it's my family, my aila, my own house, and I look after them, [...] and no one's unhappy and they all love me"(*CR*, 181). By calling prostitution "work" and the women as "hard-working", Zindi seeks to legitimize both her wards' sex-work and her own entrepreneurship. Moreover, she elevates prostitution to the status of productive labour. By presenting the women as both commodities/labourers and family members, enslaved as well as free, the narrative problematizes the situation of the migrant females.

It does not take long for the migrants to realize the delusive nature of the dazzling lights of al-Ghazira. Mast Ram becomes the victim of injustice at the hands of a labour contractor; Kulfi of anti-Indian feelings. Samuel loses his job for a moment of absent-mindedness. Several immigrants are crushed on construction sites by faulty equipment. A massive building called "The Star" collapses and traps Alu almost exactly in its centre beneath the wreckage of concrete. Pressed to explain the sequence of these terrible misfortunes, Zindi intones her "terrible litany of calamities" (*CR*, 201) which is an accurate summing up of the migrant experience. Zindi's family of assorted illegal immigrants gets a sense of their

identity through the power of her story-telling. Her narrative creates reality and meaning:

> They had lived through everything Zindi spoke of and had heard her talk of it time and time again; yet it was only in her telling that it took shape; changed fro mere incidents to a palpable thing, a block of time which was not hours or minutes or days, but something corporeal, with its own malevolent willfulness. That was Zindi's power: she could bring together empty air and give it a body just by talking of it." (*CR*, 213)

The variations which she introduces in her narrative are "like the pressure of a potter's thumb on clay – changing the thing itself and their knowledge of it" (*CR*, 213). Alu's entrapment beneath the pyramid of televisions, refrigerators, radios and other consumer products triggers a multiple of mutually exclusive interpretations about the catastrophe. Abu Fahl draws upon all his knowledge of construction to explain the crash but Hajj Fahmy would have none of it. The latter's quizzical question puzzles Abu Fahl: "If it was strong only in parts, why did the whole of it fall" (244)? He thus brings in the issue of the organic relationship between the whole and its component parts. He claims to know "the real story; the true story" (244). The point in question needs elaboration. "Truth" is provisional and contingent. A proliferation of stories exists to narrate this "truth". The stories lack veracity as the products of imagination. But each tale individualizes the teller by situating him in a particular social and economic background. Moreover, by celebrating the egalitarian spirit of oral tradition and storytelling, the narrative dismantles the notion of a single, determinate authoritative meaning. The possibility of plural interpretations rules out authoritative value-judgements and closures of meaning. By reviving the ancient tradition of storytelling, the narrative exhibits self-reflexivity. It projects the vision of "an exhausted centre" and "a vital margin" (Rushdie, "In Defence", 48). The valorization of the personal elements of oral storytelling debunks the impersonal narrative of realistic Eurocentric novels by giving each teller a distinctive voice which resists appropriation by a master narrative.

The interplay between experience and expression is a dynamic one. Experience gives rise to narratives; it acquires form and meaning in the telling. Marita Eastmond, following E.M. Bruner, distinguishes between "*life as lived*, the flow of events that touch on a person's life; *life as experienced*, how the person perceives and ascribes meaning to what happens, drawing on previous experience

and cultural repertoires" and "*life as told*, how experience is framed and articulated in a particular context and to a particular audience" (250). Zindi's narration of the stories of each immigrant can be accorded a fourth level, *life as text*. Experience is never directly represented. It is edited and interpreted at different stages of the process from life to text.

A narrative is a form in which events are described as having a meaningful and coherent order. It imposes on reality a unity which it does not inherently possess. It should be accepted, nevertheless, that in its vitality and richness, experience far exceeds the expression. Hence, "stories cannot be seen as simply reflecting life as lived, but should be seen as creative constructions or interpretations of the past, generated in specific contexts of the present" (Eastmond, 250). Thus conceptualized, stories negotiate the past and its meaning and also seek ways of going forward. Zindi's story-telling is thus reconstitutive as it organizes the experiences of the individuals and the community and restores continuity and identity.

The immigrants' contention that the Star disintegrated because of the whims of capital throws into wide relief the nexus between neocolonialism and globalization. Al-Ghazira is an old cosmopolitan mercantile centre, "a merchant's paradise, right in the centre of the world, conceived and nourished by the flow of the centuries of trade" (*CR*, 221). The solidarity between the various merchants from Persia, Iraq, Zanzibar, Oman and India rests on mutual understanding and respect. The advent of the "British gunboats" (*CR*, 221) destroys the peaceful ambience of this prosperous city. The first seeds of colonization are sown when the British resident tries to impose an oil-treaty on the Malik to secure exclusive digging rights for oil. Inspired by the "histories of the great Baghdadi and Cairene dynasties" (*CR*, 246), the Malik devises an intriguing plan for resistance which unfortunately backfires. Disengaging from strong-arm tactics, the British follows the policy of divide and rule, spreads rumours about the Malik's madness and projects his much-hated half-brother the Amir as the alternative ruler. The shrewd British presses into service its superior technological powers as a smokescreen for its appropriating intentions. With the help of its flying machines, the British plant "specially grown date palms; unique palms, which could thrive on any soil" to dazzle the Ghaziris with "the near-miracle" spectacle (*CR*, 257). Despite partial resistance from the natives which is quickly subdued, the New City emerges

overnight "like a mushroom" (*CR*, 263); the entire country is transformed into an Oiltown. So complete and successful is the domination of the colonial machinery that there "was no feud: no tyrants died; there was no fratricide, no regicide, no love, no hate. It was just practice for the princes of the future and their computers – an exercise in good husbandry" (*CR*, 262). The result is the widening gulf between the poverty of the illegal migrants and the wealth of the oil-sharks. Ghosh reflects on the devastating political fallout of the nefarious activities of the oil moguls in his essay "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel": "oil and the developments it has bought in its wake have been directly responsible for the suppression of whatever democratic aspirations and tendencies there were within the region" (*II*, 87).

The Oiltown's "uniformed hirelings from every corner of the world" (*CR*, 260) segregate it spatially from al-Ghazira transforming it into a threatening ghetto. Brought as "weapons" to "divide the Ghaziris from themselves and the world of sanity", the migrant labourers who work at the Oiltown are reduced to mere instruments at the hands of the capitalists: "those ghosts behind the fence were not men, they were the tools – helpless, picked for their poverty" (*CR*, 261). To commemorate their triumph the Oilmen decide to erect an opulent shopping complex called "an-Najma, the Star" on a marshy, unused land to celebrate "the Starry future" (*CR*, 263). The intrusion of multinational companies has already destroyed local capitalists. Jeevanbhai Patel's proximity with the old Malik of al-Ghazira causes his undoing. The enigmatic Nury the Damanhouri, who created his own unconventional brand of capitalism and revolutionized the craft of selling eggs, loses his life rebelling against the Oilmen. This entire sequence of events about capitalist domination is filtered through folk imagination with the omniscient narrator skillfully eschewing his presence. Hajj Fahmy who narrates it concludes with a fabulistic touch: "No one wanted the Star. That was why the Star fell: a house which nobody wants cannot stand" (*CR*, 264). If the Star stood for the triumph of capitalism and neo-colonization, its collapse signals their potential demise.

This optimistic note notwithstanding, the global flow of capital has converted al-Ghazira into a divided house. Cheap migrant labour, skilled in modern construction technology, has outnumbered the Ghaziris which breeds xenophobia. This explains "the entrails of unfinished buildings festooned across

the skyline, and the flow of people with their inexplicable nationalities" (*CR*, 321). The illegal immigrants populate a sequestered narrow inlet called "the Ras-al-Maqṭṭr, the Severed Head, a sandbar garotted by the road on the embankment" (*CR*, 196). People "from all the corners of the world" (*CR*, 226) create a vibrant microcosmic cosmopolitan world which outshines the "solid concrete-and-glass cliff of hotels and offices" of the Old City:

> On one side of the road, jostling for space, were tiled Iranian chelo-kebab shops, Malayali dosa stalls, long, narrow Lebanese restaurants, fruit-juice stalls run by Egyptians from the Sa'id, Yemeni cafés with aprons of brass-studded tables spread out on the pavement, vendors frying ta'ameyya on push-carts — as though half the world's haunts had been painted in miniature along the side of a single street. (*CR*, 344)

Although the Ras is considered to be a wretched place with terrifying people and a dark, labyrinthine marketplace, the Souq, appears to be "almost another country" (*CR*, 194), the heterogeneous immigrants are tied by a "close link" (*CR*, 226) which fosters solidarity. A united band, they are alert to any external threats. Their ability to transcend all divisions stems from "an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other" (239) and are concerned with "achieving competence in cultures which are initially alien" (Hannerz, 240). This precipitates "a world culture" created "through the increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures, as well as through the development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory" (Hannerz, 237).

Despite the marked differences between the Ghaziris and the migrants, what unites them is the penetration of the curses of globalization and consumerism in their lives. The huge supermarket in Hurreyya is wrapped in air-conditioning machines and bristles in "freshly frozen Australian lamb and Danish mutton, French cauliflowers and Egyptian cabbages", "Thai rice and Canadian wheat, English cod and Japanese sardines, prawns and shrimps and lobster from the world over" (*CR*, 208). The migrant labourers are allured by the Japanese cassette-recorders, watches, calculators and portable television sets, the latest brand of American jeans and Korean shirts (*CR*, 341). The disastrous effects of multiplexes and shopping malls on indigenous trade and local business are replete throughout the novel. This unrestrained market logic, freed from governmental constraints is a "strong discourse", asserts Bourdieu, "which is so strong and so hard to fight

because it has behind it all the powers of a world of power relations" (*Acts of Resistance*, 95).

Alu's miraculous survival beneath the ruins of the Star initiates an anti-capitalist drive against dehumanizing machinery. Desperately searching for Alu, his migrant friends get lost in the collapsed glass and concrete dome. It "was like the handiwork of a madman – immense steel girders leaning crazily, whole sections of the glass dome scattered about like eggshells" (*CR*, 232). The "voice" they hear is a radio accidentally switched on during the collapse of the building. Reading the episode as an "allegory about the cultural logic of global capitalism destroying the ancient trading cultures of the Middle East", Robert Dixon contends that the "'voice' concisely evokes the aesthetics of postmodernism: the loss of affect, the decentering of the bourgeois subject, the loss of interiority and the relentless commodification of culture"(17). Spiritually transfigured and carrying Balaram's spiritual legacy as he does, Alu thinks of Louis Pasteur, "about dirt and cleanliness. I'm thinking and I'm making plans. [...] I'm thinking about cleanliness and dirt and the Infinitely Small" (*CR*, 235). Buried alive in the ruins of capitalism, Alu has found the elusive breeding ground of germs – "Money. The answer is money"(*CR*, 281). Balaram believed that carbolic acid would realize Pasteur's dream of cleaning the world. Going a step further, Alu identifies money as the prime pollutant and so makes it his exclusive target: "We will drive money from the Ras, and without it we shall be happier, richer, more prosperous than ever before"(*CR*, 281). Evoking a Gandhian vision of an anti-materialist, collective society the zealous Alu prepares to establish a commune in which the inhabitants of the Ras are to pool their earnings and jointly buy goods and services from the Souq through an agent. Since no one makes a profit beyond what is immediately needed, the profit-making commerce in the Ras will come to an end. Inspired by a socialist vision, Alu's micro-economy seeks to remove the curses of capitalism. A very silent man before his brush with death, Alu speaks to his spellbound audience with an extraordinary passion. And he speaks in a multitude of languages:

> Not in one language but in three, four, God knows how many, a khichri of words; couscous, rice, dal and onions, all stirred together, stamped and boiled, Arabic with Hindi, Hindi swallowing Bengali, English doing a dance; tongues unravelled and woven together. [...] They understood him, for

> his voice was only the question; the answers were their own.
> (*CR*, 279)

Alu's discourse weaves a pattern which dissolves all linguistic heterogeneities and creates a communicative relationship in which the self searches for the other in the form of a question. His audience, the other, answers enigmatically through a strange silence illustrating its communicative potential which "assigns speech to its exact position, designating its domain": "By speech, silence becomes the centre and principle of expression, its vanishing point. Speech eventually has nothing more to tell us: we investigate the silence, for it is the silence that is doing the speaking" (Macherey, 96).

Alu lives up to his real name, Nachiketa. In Hindu mythology Nachiketa incurs his father's rage by his persistent questions about Brahman. In exasperation, Uddalaka curses him to go to the nether world – Yamaloka, the world of Yama, the god of death. Nachiketa pleads with the righteous Yama for divine knowledge. Moved at his devotion and ardour, Yama grants his prayer for the knowledge of Brahman. The entrapped Alu, lying at death's door and meditating on purity is a modern avatar of the mythological Nachiketa. The informed reader would appreciate the significance of Alu's name as Nachiketa.

Like Balaram's, Alu's emancipatory drive ends in disaster. His earnest efforts to create a money-free commune and develop a postcolonial utopia degenerate into mutual suspicion and greed. With all the money going to Alu's socialist fund, Zindi's authority over her household declines which prompts her to take possession over Forid Mian's small tailoring shop. The machinating Jeevanbhai stipulates that the police officials Jyoti Das and Jai Lal be allowed into the Ras as part of the deal for the shop. By presenting Jyoti Das and Jai Lal as "ordinary people" and "friends" from India, the tenacious Jeevanbhai persuades Zindi to identify Alu to them. Thus the two Indian police officers who started hunting for Alu in Part One catch up with their quarry in Part Two. Zindi is more of a dupe than a traitor and her beloved family is well on its way to disintegration. When Alu and his associates wage war on germs – both money and the "infinitely Small" (microbes) with buckets of carbolic acid, Zindi's own household turns against her. The "bewildered" (*CR*, 315) Alu's clarion call for purity and cleanliness has been completely misinterpreted by the Ras volunteers. He has initiated a process over which he loses all control: "He could no longer understand

what he'd started (*CR*,316). In an ironic reversal, scared by the bizarre happenings in front of him, Das himself runs away from the fugitive: "it was as though the world had suddenly started moving backwards" (*CR*,316). The immigrants' strong desire for material possessions explodes the utopian project. When they embark on a shopping trip, the new regime of al-Ghazira interprets it to be a demonstration by immigrant workers. The composite, diasporic community of the Ras is decimated by the forces of capital and police. From the perspective of the police, the community of migrant labourers are protesters against the new rulers of al-Ghazira. The neocolonial regime resists the attempts of the subaltern people to become part of civil society. Reminiscent of Balaram's fate, Alu's socialist efforts are crushed by the state power. In the resulting ambush, many of Alu's friends are killed, as were the members of Balaram's household. Alu escapes, as before, in another migratory flight. Zindi leads Alu, Kulfi, the baby Boss, Zaghloul and Abu Fahl to her native village in Egypt. Far from providing the homeless with shelter, the wives of Zindi's brothers hound her out, accusing her as a "whore" and a brothel keeper. Ironically, Zindi's brothers built their home with her own dirhams. Snapping of family ties is nothing new for Zindi. Her husband abandoned her long ago in Alexandria on discovering her barrenness. Zindi realizes then the vital importance of the family and identity after all her ties have been severed. Rootless once again because of Jyoti Das's relentless pursuit, she leads her entourage to the west "where the sewing-machines are"(*CR*, 365). With "chance beginning to play at puppetry with them", their only hope is the border: "The border it had to be; safety lay on the other side, in the vast welcoming emptiness of the Sahara"(*CR*, 367). Normally a difficult terrain to cross, the vast Sahara holds for the desperate Zindi a promise of deliverance. Crossing over to Algeria, Zindi passes Alu and Kulfi off as a married couple and herself as the nanny to their child.

The novel's Second Part explores passion at various levels – Mast Ram's sexual passion, Jeevanbhai's passion for intrigue, the oil-men's passion for money, Zindi's passion for corporate life, Alu's passion for communitarianism. All of these passionate pursuits, except the oil-men's, end in failures. In contrast to the First Part's presentation of reason-propelled personal egoism in the figure of Bhudeb Roy, the Second Part presents the oil-men's pursuit of Reason on a larger, collective level in the form of capitalism. But the collapse of the Star and Alu's miraculous survival undermines the validity of Reason. Thus the attack on Reason

is explicit in the First Part and implicit in the Second. The First Part presents migrants who were uprooted from their homelands because of political upheaval. The Second Part presents a vast gallery of people who migrate because of economic pressure. Ghosh thus constructs an unrecorded, and so marginalized, subaltern history of the people displaced by artisan guilds, marriage brokers and labour racketeers. They create stories and personalised myths which are on the borders of reason. In this fluid world of unstable identities and multiculturality, the migrants from Noahkhali in Lalpukur and the Mawali in al-Ghazira hold on to their language and culture as their last anchorage. So do the colonizers in al-Ghazira.

While the first two parts of the novel explored the limitations of the dogmatic ideals of the Enlightenment and their incommensurability with the demands of practical life, the third part "Tamas: Death" aims at a negotiation between science, humanism and religion in post-colonial Algeria. The Algerian nation is a paradox. The legacy of colonialism and racism still persists as the French doctors in Algeria are paid more, "simply for being French" (*CR*, 375). Yet alone among the oil producing nations, the Algerian government is sympathetic to the common people with an "energetic purposiveness, a belief in the future" (*CR*, 375). The country has risen from the ashes, surviving the horrors of concentration camps and organized genocide by the French. In a small Algerian town, Ghosh presents an expatriate Indian community whose members are sharply contrasted. The microbiologist Dr. Uma Verma is very eager to present a toast of Indian culture to a foreign audience and decides to stage Tagore's *Chitrangada* with the refugees in the main cast. The surgeon Dr.Mishra is skeptical about the success of the project before a "rational" and "scientifically trained" (*CR*, 381) Algerian audience. Dr. Mishra resists Dr. Verma's plans not simply on rational grounds. He intends to repeat his rabble-rousing speech on social justice and equality delivered on the same occasion the year before. Dr.Verma questions Dr.Mishra's and his father's Murali Charan Mishra's socialist credentials, and dismisses Dr.Mishra's rhetoric as hollow sham. The "real" socialist Hem Narain Mathur, she claims, died in "unsung obscurity" (*CR*, 377). He held steadfast to his vision and suffered for it. On the contrary, the self-serving Murali Charan rubbed shoulders with the political parties in power. Although unsuccessful, Alu has

practiced socialism with his companions in al-Ghazira. The narrative thus counterpoints the bourgeois and subaltern versions of the same ideology.

According to the *Mahabharata*, Chitrangada, the princess of Manipur, is spurned by Arjuna when she declares her love for him. Being a warrior princess, she is brought up like a man. Granted by the gods the boon of physical beauty for a year to attract Arjuna, Chitrangada succeeds. Arjuna, learning more about the warrior princess from hearsay, is drawn to Chitrangada's other self. At the end of the year, Arjuna realizes the act of transformation, and both of them find the truth through illusion. In the dramatic re-enactment of the legend, Kulfi will impersonate Chitrangada, and the footloose Jyoti Das, whom chance brings to Dr.Verma's bungalow, Arjuna. The display of native culture in a diasporic community is one way of reclaiming national identity. Evidently cultural practices are deterritorialized.

Kulfi empathizes deeply with her part. The relation of her self with her stage role, her other, is one of identity and difference. Realizing that Kulfi's Arjuna is none other than the bird-man, Zindi has a premonition that "one of us isn't going to leave this house alive"(393). Tagore's *Chitrangada* privileges spiritual over physical love. It also underlines the illusiveness of beauty. Kulfi, a prostitute at Zindi's brothel, never has a grasp of the essence of her role. She lures Jyoti Das, impersonating Arjuna, with her erotic charm. Das, on his part, feels a strong carnal desire for Kulfi. He pleads for a night's liaison. Kulfi cannot withstand the intensity of the moment and dies of heart attack. The cultural show thus aborts. Like the other utopian projects in the novel, this one too ends in failure.

Not content with his vehement opposition to the staging of *Chitrangada*, Dr. Mishra questions Dr.Verma's compliance with rules and rituals. For him, the following of the religious rites in a makeshift manner by substituting the tap water for the holy water of the Ganges is absurd. It is simply contrary to a rational, secular outlook. Dr.Mishra has a literalist's understanding of the Hindu rituals, but he has failed to imbibe their true spirit. In stark contrast, Dr.Verma views religion as a source of truth and values, a cultural practice expressing deep sentiments. She challenges Mishra's doctrinaire rationalism that militates against basic human feelings:

> Rules, rules, [...]. All you ever talk about is rules. That's how you and your kind have destroyed everything – science, religion, socialism – with your rules and your orthodoxies. That's the difference between us: you worry about rules and I worry about being human. (*CR*, 409)

Dr.Verma has a kindred soul in Balaram, who too revolted against science on realizing its divorce from human emotions. Carbolic acid reappears in the novel as Dr.Verma cleans the place for Kulfi's dead body. She rebels against the tyranny of the "despotic science" of microbiology and wonders whether the microbes can be "wholly external to our minds"(*CR*,412)? Despite the injunction of science, Dr.Verma has realized the vital truth that "[t]here's nothing wrong with your body – all you have to do to cure yourself is try to be a better human being"(*CR*,413). Opposed to rigorism of any kind, she acts against the police diktat that there could be no cremation for a "passing Indian tourist"(*CR*,413). She believes that the lessons the Algerians have learned from the brutalizing French colonizers is that "every consummated death is another beginning"(*CR*,414). As the book is of no more use as a source of inspiration, Alu places the *Life of Pasteur* on Kulfi's funeral pyre. Refusing to accept either science or religion too literally, Dr.Verma blurs the boundaries of the two, and opts for syncretism: "Nothing's whole any more. If we wait for everything to be right again, we'll wait forever while the world falls apart. The only hope is to make do with what we've got"(*CR*,416-417). Not a rational but an ethical humanist and a pragmatist at that, Dr.Verma articulates the novel's positive values.

Alu chances upon a copy of the *Life of Pasteur* in Hem Narain Mathur's bookcase at his daughter Dr.Verma's residence. It was presented to Mathur by Balaram in Calcutta. The book is so dear to Alu that on finding it miles away from Lalpukur his eyes fill with tears. He hails the book as his "only real brother"(*CR*,395). The same book brought tears to his adolescent eyes during his stay with Balaram. The book has an equal importance in Dr.Verma's life. It is because of the *Life of Pasteur* that she has become a microbiologist. Balaram tried to act out his scientific and pseudo-scientific ideas and came a cropper. His friend Mathur, a dedicated socialist, wanted to realize in society the kind of order symbolized by science. As a failed socialist, he had to remain content with the unactualized vision of order. Science and the bookcase offered him a vicarious satisfaction for his unrealized dream. Handing over the book to Alu, Dr.Verma

completes a pattern. Precisely at that moment, the book falls open, and makes a mystical pronouncement: "It's about death, Alu said. It says that without the germ 'life would become impossible because death would be complete'"(*CR* 396). Dr.Verma succeeds in establishing a synthesis between reason and emotion, science and religion. Hence she dispenses with the book. As the two terms of a dialectic, life and death are complementary opposites and so inseparable. Similarly mind and body, heart and head, East and West, religion and science, and good and evil always permeate each other. They are correlates. The idea of rigidity, of pure essentialist boundaries is a mere shibboleth as R. Radhakrishnan explains:

> there is no pure way back to the indigenous or the precolonial except through double consciousness. We have all been touched by the West. The important question is not about ontological purity, but about strategies of using the West against itself in conjunction with finding one's own "voice." [...] Spivak's position is that "we are both where we are and what we think," and if in a sense, as a result of colonialism, "where we think" is the West as well, it is quixotic to deny it. The way out is bricolage, transactional readings based on bilateralism, and multiple non-totalizable interruptions. (157-158)

The first section, Reason, is dominated by the male principle represented by Balaram, the second, Passion, by the female principle, represented by Zindi, the third, Darkness, attempts a synthesis between the opposites of Reason and Passion, Male and Female. Dr.Verma's interrogating the dogmas of science and religion and yet attempting a synthesis between the two is the dominant thesis of the novel.

The novel's third section is up to a point preoccupied with death. An old man falls overboard the *Zeynab*. Kulfi dies during the rehearsal of *Chitrangada*. For Zindi, Dr.Verma's house is an abode of death. Zindi and Alu meet metamorphic deaths as the former is without her characteristic dynamism and the latter's stiff thumbs forbid him to weave. S. Radhakrishnan describes "Tamas" as "darkness and inertia" (317). "Tamas" also indicates a tendency to decay, to die. However, the novel ends on a positive note of sorts. Alu's stiff thumbs start moving. Zindi fervently hopes that Boss will build for her a house some day.

Through Jyoti Das, the novelist explores the theme of migration. Journeying by plane to al-Ghazira, Das reflects on his diasporic condition: "foreign places are all alike in that they are not home. Nothing binds you

there"(*CR*,266). His journey from his home to al-Ghazira is a journey from the known to the unknown. There is a feeling of disjunction between his present and his past. The journey abroad entails separation from home and so causes anguish. Since by now Das has got over all painful emotion, his foreign travel has no more significance for him: "The journey was within and it was already over, for the most important part was leaving"(*CR*,266). For Das, al-Ghazira is not a place "but a question: are foreign countries merely not-home, or are they all that home is not"(*CR*,269)? This is a typical migrant's experience. He never feels "at home" in a new place. Alu, on the contrary, has found a new community in the Ras and has identified with its members completely.

Throwing up his job, Jyoti Das exults in his new-found freedom, and revels in the prospects of a new life at Dusseldorf. The school of dolphins "racing along the ferry, leaping, dancing, standing on their tails" and the "soaring birds" replicate his own euphoria. His past is like a "mocking grey smudge hanging on the horizon". Rejecting the "continents of defeat – defeat at home, defeat in the world", Jyoti plunges into his future: "And so he turned to face the land before him, now grown so real, and dizzy with exultation he prepared to step into a new world" (*CR*,423). Jyoti Das is a bourgeois migrant. Financially secure, he has every reason to look forward to a prosperous future. Alu and Zindi are subaltern migrants, who resign themselves to their fate. They wait, "drowsily warmed by the clear sunlight", for the ship that will carry them to an unspecified "home". The novel's final sentence "Hope is the beginning"(*CR*,423) is pregnant of a new vision, of unactualized possibilities. Putting behind their unhappy past, these subalterns venture out to affront their destiny once more. Hope can only motivate a start, but whether it will lead to fulfillment or frustration is always a toss-up.

Chapter Three

Transcending Boundaries

The Shadow Lines

Human experience is finely textured, dense and accessible enough *not* to need extra-historical or extra-worldly agencies to illuminate or explain it. — Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

[...] true reality being discoverable only by the mind, being the object of a mental process, we acquire a true knowledge only of things that we are obliged to recreate by thought, things are hidden from us in everyday life. — Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, III

We live in a world of imagined communities. We are also policed through a world of fixed state borders. Accustomed as we are to the fluidity of our own imaginations, we are also, increasingly, being accustomed to negotiating borders, and using the one to serve the other. — Abena Busia, *ALA Bulletin*

The Shadow Lines (1988) is Amitav Ghosh's acclaimed masterpiece. The novel won the Sahitya Akademi award, India's most prestigious annual literary prize, as well as the Ananda Puraskar in 1990. Engagingly, *The Shadow Lines* has had a diverse critical reception. For Maria Elena Martos Hueso, the novel is "structured as a *bildungsroman*, as the unfolding of the narration reveals the maturing progression of the narrator's consciousness" (198). Going a step further, Meenakshi Malhotra believes that "it is possible to wrench a female 'bildungsroman' out of the narrative of *The Shadow Lines*" (166). Ian Almond, on the contrary, thinks that although the novel "does narrate the development of an imagination", it is "not quite a *Bildungsroman*" (61). If for R.K. Dhawan *The Shadow Lines* is a "family saga" (20), for Indira Bhatt it is a "'once upon a time' type of story narrated autobiographically yet with a multiple perspective" (33). The novel brings together "the forms of the autobiographical novel and the family chronicle", counterclaims Louis James "to subvert both" (158). A counterblast to all this is Arvind Chowdhary's assertion that the novel is "neither a novel of character nor a novel of plot but a 'novel of ideas'" (5).

Like its form, the novel's theme too sharply divides its critics. "Sadness [...] is the key function of *The Shadow Lines*", contends Ian Almond, "the epitomizing theme of the book" (58). Ulka Joshi, conversely, examines the novel's subtle humour in "family jokes and gossips which are cherished in family gatherings" (101). While Seema Bhaduri focuses on Ghosh's treatment in *The Shadow Lines* of the "changing middle-class ethos in India during the pre- and post-Independence era" (105), Shubha Tiwari believes that "childhood" is a "major theme of this book" (23). Alpana Neogy explores in the novel the "theme of being an exile or being at home through three generations of women" (216). Claire Chambers examines the novel's representations of the phenomenon of post-1947 communal violence. For her the novel "revolves around the trauma of the 'vivisection' of India and its continuing reverberations decades later" ("Riots, Rumours and Relics", 37). Interestingly, despite Amitav Ghosh's avowal that "[by] instinct I'm non-political" ("Shadow Script", 32), Novy Kapadia asserts that the "overall focus" in the novel is on the "meaning and shades of political nuances in contemporary life" (122). Indeed, *The Shadow Lines* is so intensely orchestrated that it can sustain interpretations from disparate points of view.

The memories of the 1964 riot haunt the narrator but he successfully suppresses them. A chance remark in 1979 by his friend Malik prompts him to delve into the past and unpack the trauma of his uncle Tridib's death in detail. Here, too, as in *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh's fascination with chance is quite evident. This is reminiscent of the chance memory that launched the narrator into a journey backwards in time in Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. Embarking on his project the narrator realizes the enormity of the task before him:

> Every word I write about those events of 1964 is the product of a struggle with silence. It is a struggle I am destined to lose – have already lost – for even after all these years, I do not know where within me, in which corner of my world, this silence lies. (*The Shadow Lines*, 218)

He acknowledges his defeat to this insuperable "silence" because "it is not a presence at all; it is simply a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are no words" (*SL*, 218). The narrator shockingly realizes that the riots have disappeared into a "volcano of silence" (*SL*, 230) and are preserved only in personal memory. He thus boldly outlines the thrust of his micro-historic project and engages with the occlusions of nationalist historiography. Interestingly, Ila, the narrator's

doppelganger, informs him that "nothing really important ever happens" (*SL*, 104) where he lives. She expresses the metropolitan's disdain for the periphery in her dismissal of the pettiness of the lives "lived out in the silence of voiceless events in a backward world":

> Well of course there are famines and riots and disasters, she said. But those are local things after all – not like revolutions or anti-fascist wars, nothing that sets a political example to the world, nothing that's really remembered. (*SL*, 104)

Furthermore, the narrator reflects on the most terrible of all silences, "the silence that lies in the gap between words and the world":

> This is a silence that is proof against any conceivable act of scorn or courage; it lies beyond defiance – for what means have we to defy the mere absence of meaning? Where there is no meaning, there is banality, and that is what this silence consists in, that is why it cannot be defeated – because it is the silence of an absolute, impenetrable banality. (*SL*, 218)

One of the great quests of modern philosophy has been to discover how language is able to generate meaning, and what meaning actually is. Tridib's appalling death is a certain moment where language fails; it is an abyss that language is unable to bridge. Meaning can only be formed when there is perfect correspondence between the world and the word, between the world of experience and the method of representation. Nationalist historiography and newspaper reports create gaps and fissures because by excluding the reports about the riots they push the riots into the "chasm of that silence" (*SL*, 219). Reports about party congresses and elections are foregrounded in newspapers and histories "as though words could never exhaust their significance" (*SL*, 228), but for these riots "we can only use words of description when they happen and then fall silent, for to look for words of any other kind would be to give them meaning, and that is a risk we cannot take any more than we can afford to listen to madness" (*SL*, 228). The riot in question is an unreconstructed subaltern past which remains an unassimilated fragment inexplicable in the language of modern history and the political logic of the nation which is the "theatre of war, where generals meet, [...] the stage on which states disport themselves" (*SL*, 226). Historiography reduces "the lives of men and women to the play of material interests, or at other times to large impersonal movements in economy and society over which human beings have no control", acknowledges Gyan Pandey, which "often leaves little room for the emotions of people, for feelings and perceptions" (40-41). Official histories

can offer only silence and absence of meaning. The narrator's father had no inkling of the turn of events because the Calcutta based newspaper "run by people who believed in the power of distance no less than I did" (*SL*, 227) did not mention it. He was "merely another victim of that seamless silence" (*SL*, 227). So complete is that "silence" that it takes the narrator fifteen years to discover that there was any connection between his nightmarish bus ride back from school in Calcutta and Tridib's death in Dhaka. Confronted with this paralyzing silence the narrator can "only describe at second hand the manner of Tridib's death: I do not have the words to give it meaning. *I do not have the words,* and I do not have the strength to listen" (*SL*, 228, italics original). By allowing stories to be told in the victim's own voices – Robi's account of his dream and May's reportage of Tridib's death – the narrator hauntingly evokes the horror and meaninglessness of Tridib's death. Urbashi Butalia stresses the importance of orality in remembering the trauma: "Stories are all that people have, stories that rarely breach the frontiers of family and religious community: people talking to their own blood" (253). This is perhaps an appropriate way to narrate Tridib's predicament as he believed that "[e]veryone lives in a story [...] because stories are all there to live in, it was just a question of which one you choose" (*SL*, 182). Thus by relying on the dynamics of memory, the narrator proposes to recapture the absences of written words and by coalescing both "analytical" and "affective" histories create "humanely constructed and independent histories that are fundamentally knowable, although not through grand theory or systematic totalization" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 377). The past is represented through an amalgamation of official history and personal imagination, and "each of these [...] realities must imagine its own discursive-epistemic space as a form of openness to one another's persuasion" (R. Radhakrishnan, 61). The narrative thus becomes the whole which interweaves "history, the discipline, and other forms of memory together so that they can help in the interrogation of each other, to work out the ways these immiscible forms of recalling the past are juxtaposed" (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 93-94).

Tridib, the narrator's mentor, himself constructs the personal history of an English family in England on the eve of the Second World War. He clearly imagines the lives of Tresawsen and his friends from photographs at Mrs. Price's home. Tridib constructs for the narrator the minute details of the lives of Alan

Tresawsen, Francesca Halevy, Mike and Dan, their petty arguments and jealousies. While Tridib is aware of the unfathomable depth of the human mind to recreate the past, he also knows that the "clarity of that image in his mind was merely the seductive clarity of ignorance; an illusion of knowledge created by the deceptive weight of remembered detail" (*SL*, 67). He stops at a certain point because he has no idea of the emotions of the remembered individuals; he cannot plunge into the consciousnesses of the people who are devastated by a global war:

> The realities of the bombs and torpedoes and the dying was [sic]easy enough to imagine – mere events, after all, recorded in thousands of films and photographs and record books. But not that other more important reality: the fact that they *knew* [...] in all probability they themselves, would not survive the war. What is the colour of that knowledge? Nobody knows, nobody can ever know, not even in memory, because there are moments in time that are not *knowable*: nobody can ever know what it was like to be young and intelligent in the summer of 1939 in London or Berlin. (*SL*, 68)

Since the past leaves its traces on the present, the shaping power of imagination can construe some sense of the "colour of that knowledge". Tridib's weaving the "web of trusts and affections and small jealousies that held them together" (*SL*, 67) is an alternative narrative in defiance of the metanarrative of History. In the novel Francesca Halevy, a victim of physical and psychic displacement, prefigures Thamma and Ila as displaced persons. Tridib inspires the narrator to construct his own narrative in order to avoid getting entangled in someone else's oppressive stories, be it that of nationalism or communal factionalism. The alternative to inventing one's own story "wasn't blankness – it only meant that if we didn't try ourselves, we would never be free of other people's inventions" (*SL*, 31). The narrator's endeavour to write "the human history" is one way of establishing Ghosh's credo: "It's about finding the human predicament; it's about finding what happens to individuals, characters" ("The Shadow Script", 30).

The son of a diplomat, Tridib rejects his father's peripatetic life-style, and lives in Calcutta pursuing his research in archaeology. Thamma discards research as a "lifelong pilgrimage" (*SL*, 7) and dismisses Tridib as a "loafer and a wastrel" (*SL*, 3), "an essentially lightweight and frivolous character" (*SL*, 6), an irresponsible man "determined to waste his life in idle self-indulgence" (*SL*, 6). Unlike Thamma, who thinks that Tridib's wasted time stinks, the narrator delights in Tridib's stories: "he never seemed to use his time, but his time didn't stink"

(*SL*, 4). The range of Tridib's intellectual interests is matched by his fluid personality. To his *adda* acquaintances, he is anyone from a slum-dweller to an aristocrat. What the narrator likes best in Tridib is his detachment, his "difference" from others. For him, Tridib's stories are a gateway to the world.

The archaeologist Tridib, endowed with an imagination *par excellence*, instills in the narrator an obsession with the past. Tridib teaches the narrator to use his imagination with so much precision that the locations envisioned in the mind "were infinitely more detailed, more precise than anything I would ever see" (*SL*, 29). Cultural space can be configured and the unknown can be experienced "concretely" (*SL*, 29) in the imagination. After all, "a place does not merely exist, [...] it has to be invented in one's imagination" (*SL*, 21). Tridib points out places on the Bartholomew's Atlas and also tells him stories about them: "Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with" (*SL*, 20). This gives wings to the narrator's cartographic imagination which leads to the dissolution of spatial boundaries. The details of the story of Tridib's stay in London during the Second World War are so indelibly etched in the young narrator's impressionable mind that he empathizes with Tridib thereby dissolving their selves: "I have come to believe that I was eight too when Tridib first talked to me about that journey. [...] I had decided that he had looked like me" (*SL*, 3). Tridib's and the narrator's prioritization of the mind and the imagination conform with the idealist perception of knowledge, to the mystery of the relation between an object and a consciousness. For Georges Poulet the entire issue boils down to the question: "how can an exterior object be transmuted into this interior and immaterial thing, as intimate to us as ourselves, in which the mind freely plunges, moves, takes delight and life" (164)? A detailed explication of the spiritualization of the object is found in Proust. "All impression", says Proust, "is double: half enveloped in the object, and half produced in oneself" (545). Attention is usually paid to the exterior part of the impression, which teaches us nothing of its nature or of ourselves. When by an act of the imagination the interior part which is truly ours is extricated, then this "pure and disincarnate" essence withdraws from the exterior object and also from the temporal groove becoming thereby a free production of the mind. For "the act of imagination or of memory is nothing other than that: to oppose to the exterior perception an image which might be our own creation; to raise up the impression into an expression; to find the metaphor. Such

is the spiritual effort every tangible object demands of us" (Poulet, 166). Central to Tridib's conception is his passionate wish to know and understand the other:

> He said to me once that one could never know anything except through desire, real desire, which was not the same thing as greed or lust; a pure, painful and primitive desire, a longing for everything that was not in oneself, a torment of the flesh, that carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror. (*SL*, 29)

What is manifest here is Tridib's curiosity to transcend the limits of the self into the other, to become a part of the other. This identity and correlation of the subject and the object is well enunciated by F.H. Bradley: "To know a not-self is to transcend and leave one's mind. If we know the whole, it can only be because the whole knows itself in us, because the whole is self or mind, which is and knows, knows and is, the identity and correlation of subject and object" (324). Thus through generosity the world of the self widens to welcome the dimension of the other; the self's homeland has become a haven for the other, "subjectivity" is presented "as welcoming the Other, as hospitality" (Levinas, 27). Under Tridib's tutelage, the narrator recognizes the contemporaneity of the past and the lines that demarcate imagination and reality, the self and the other are blurred.

Tridib is anything but a romantic dreamer of utopian fairy lands. On the contrary, his imagination is shaped by the specificities of material culture. What delights him when Ila's mother narrates their gripping adventures in Sri Lanka is not the monitoring lizard, but the sloping roofs of their houses very different from the flats in Calcutta. When the narrator reflects on Tridib's minute observation he feels that "I too could see how much more interesting they were than the snake and the lizard, in the very ordinariness of their difference" (*SL*, 29). Tridib's imagination thus not only fuses spatial boundaries but is also aware of the differences in cultures. Moreover, through his narrative Tridib is able to bring alive a space to the narrator. The latter is able to consolidate all of Tridib's stories about wartime London into his memory atlas. He impresses everyone in London with his accurate descriptions of the hitherto unseen underground chambers, house designs and lanes. For the narrator, however, this is not at all an arduous task because "having seen it first through Tridib's eyes, its past seemed concurrent with the present" (*SL*, 31).

Tridib, the inspired lover, seems to have chosen to live the story of Tristan, a story that cannot be plotted on any map. The story defies any spatial and temporal specificity:

> It happened everywhere [...]. It was an old story, the best story in Europe, Snipe said, told when Europe was a better place, a place without borders and countries – it was a German story in what we call Germany, Nordic in the north, French in France, Welsh in Wales, Corn in Cornwall. (*SL*, 186)

Tristan's is a very sad story about a man "without a country, who fell in love with a woman-across-the-seas"(*SL*,186). The romance of Tridib-Tristan finds its consummate object in May. In his fourth letter to May, Tridib gives an elaborate, pornographic account of the sexual love of two strangers in a bombed-out theatre in war-time London. He rams home the point that that is how he desires to meet May, "as a stranger in a ruin": "as the completest of strangers – strangers across the seas – all the more strangers because they knew each other completely" (*SL*, 144). What is more he wants to meet her in a place "without a past, without history, free, really free, two people coming together with the utter freedom of strangers" (*SL*, 144). Like Tristan who is a man without a country, Tridib's imagination enables him to think beyond the boundaries of cultures and nations, time and space. Hence, his craving for an ahistorical meeting place. He longs for a transcendental state outside ordinary human experience, beyond the realm of distinctions where opposites cancel each other out. Tridib's passion becomes an analogue of ecstasy whose power dissolves the world, "'the others' cease to be present; and there are no longer either neighbours or duties, or binding ties, or earth or sky; one is alone with all that one loves. 'We have lost the world and the world us'" (Rougemont, 146). Such is the nature of this ecstasy. It is indeed ironic that a person who desires absolute freedom, who like an artist creates his own world in order to be free of others' inventions, who transcends arbitrary borders and distinctions and hatreds in search of a truer sense of commonality, finds himself entangled in communal riots. May once abused Tridib as an incompetent person: "All you're good for is words. Can't you ever do anything" (*SL*, 173). The same Tridib, urged by May, heroically steps out of the car in Dhaka to rescue the nonagenarian Jethamoshai and is slaughtered by a frenzied mob.

If Tridib is the narrator's mentor, Ila is the narrator's antithesis. Like Tridib, Ila is the child of a diplomat, a world traveller. But she is the obverse of an

imaginative traveller, her consciousness is the product of a "worldwide string of departure lounges" (*SL*, 21). She might have travelled all across the globe, but she is so insular that "although she had lived in many places, she had never travelled at all" (*SL*, 21). The places went past her in an "illusory whirl of movement" (*SL*, 23). On the contrary, the narrator passionately believes that "a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one's imagination" (*SL*, 21). Ila's presentism blunts her vision and cramps her to make any inter-cultural negotiations. What she remembers are excitements triggered by the "shifting landscapes of her childhood" (*SL*, 20). Hence, the lack of concreteness of her imagination:

> Ila lived so intensely in the present that she would not have believed that there really were people like Tridib, who could experience the world as concretely in their imaginations as she did through her senses.[...]
>
> For Ila the current was the real: it was as though she lived in a present which was like an airlock in a canal, shut away from the tidewaters of the past and the future by steel floodgates. (*SL*, 30)

The narrator travels in the mind, in his imagination, clinging to influences coming from outside (Dhaka, London, foreign places on maps) while Ila travels actually in person. The migrant subject does not necessarily need to move physically or geographically as Ila does, but he/she may be migrant on the social and cultural level like the narrator. Ila has no sense of identity and continuity with the past. The temporal perspective in her life has become so foreshortened that she lives in a perpetual present, not the experiential, qualitative co-presence of all the elements constituting the past recaptured by memory. Her peripatetic lifestyle has enlarged her mastery over physical space but has also confined her "increasingly to the *mental* and *emotional space* of the momentary present devoid of continuity and significant relations with past and future" (Meyerhoff, 111). Hence, Ila's dimension of mental "space" has contracted to the fragmentary moment of the present.

The game of Houses that Ila plays with the narrator enables her to evade the troubles of reality and escape into the world of wishful fantasy. Ila's imagination is dictated by her life abroad. The "house" they inhabit in their play is in London, the fantasy child Magda is a beautiful blonde. No one has ever seen "anyone as beautiful as Magda. They had never seen such deep blue eyes, nor

cheeks as pink and healthy and smiling as hers" (*SL*,73). Ila's narrative about Magda-Denise-Nick Price compensates for her bitter experience of racism in England. She projects her own self on Magda, a symbol of beauty and therefore of goodness and happiness. Ila idealizes Nick as a chivalrous figure who saves her from the torments of the racist Denise. In reality, however, Nick proves to be an unheroic figure that shies away from protecting Ila from such racial abuse. While Ila's fantasy conjures Nick as "a boy in shorts [...] his head a blaze of yellow, rescuing a little girl from her tormentor" (*SL*, 75), May confesses that "Nick didn't want to be seen with Ila" (*SL*, 76), an Indian. Ila's love for Nick suggests a kind of colonization of the imagination. Psychological colonialism, as Ashis Nandy perceives it, "colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all. [...] The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds"(xi). Ila shares a house in London with a group of people who are activists in various movements like the Fourth International and the Anti-Nazi League. Her roommates regarded her as "'our own upper-class Asian Marxist'" (*SL*, 97). She takes a lot of pride in her belief that their endeavour will become a part of history. Such is the extent of her psychological invasion by the West that she dismisses her native country as a place where "nothing really important ever happens" because it belongs to the "third World": "there's a joy merely in knowing that you're a part of history. We may not achieve much in our little house in Stockwell, but we *know* that in the future political people everywhere will look to us – in Nigeria, India, Malaysia" (*SL*, 104). By the end of the novel, Ila is deluded as she become a victim of Nick's fecklessness. But to maintain an air of superiority over the narrator she creates stories to cover up her disappointments abroad:

> You mustn't pay any attention to what I said the other day, [...]. I was just overwrought, and it made me suspicious. Nick wouldn't dream of doing anything that might upset me, really, believe me. You mustn't believe a word I said. I made it all up. That's what I did, I made it all up. That's the truth of it. [...] It's all fine now. We need a little holiday, that's all". (*SL*, 248)

Ila, the most deracinated and dislocated character in the novel, is also the most self-deceived.

Ila, however, plays a pivotal role in the narrator's life because she originates his sexual desire and also its suppression. When his mother blurts out that the child-narrator has impatiently waited to meet Ila, he feels exposed and

embarrassed. Ila's knowledge about his feelings gives her the ascendant position in their relationship: "she had given Ila the knowledge of her power and she had left me defenseless; naked, in the face of that unthinkable, adult truth: that need is not transitive, that one may need without oneself being needed" (*SL*, 44). When they grow into adulthood, Ila appears as enchanting to the narrator as ever: "She looked improbably exotic to me, dressed in faded blue jeans and a T shirt – like no girl I had ever seen before except in pictures in American magazines" (*SL*, 81). While Ila is obsessed with the white-skinned Nick, the narrator's conception of Ila emphasizes her Western ways. The narrator's love for Ila, however, remains unconsummated. He is forced to suppress his feelings for Ila when he realizes that she is deeply in love with Nick: "I knew that a part of my life as a human being had ceased: that I no longer existed, but as a chronicle" (*SL*, 112). The narrator's dilly-dallying about whether he should proceed or recede in his relationship with Ila leads to a schizophrenic split within his mind, whose resolution ultimately paves the way to his spiritual evolution.

Ila is a transgressor whose migrant, multicultural worldview counterpoints the traditional Indian bourgeois outlook of Thamma. Ila's absorption of Western values and Western life-style antagonizes Thamma to such an extent that she calls Ila an "English whore", a "memshaheb whore" (*SL*, 90). Thamma and Ila are oppositely oriented towards the concept of "freedom". The nationalist Thamma conceives "freedom" as independence from centuries of colonial oppression; for Ila it is liberty from the baggage of culture as also from patriarchy. Ila's estrangement from Indian cultural traditions comes to the fore when she goes to the nightclub of the Grand Hotel in Calcutta along with Robi and the narrator. Robi not only refuses to dance with Ila but also restrains Ila from dancing at the discotheque. When the defiant Ila begins dancing with a stranger, Robi pushes him away and drags Ila out saying "girls don't behave like that here" (*SL*, 88). What Robi asserts is cultural difference: "You can do what you like in England. [...] But here there are certain things you cannot do. That's our culture; that's how we live" (*SL*, 88). Since "context" had no place in Ila's judgments, for her "morality could only be an absolute" (*SL*, 92). Ila vehemently opposes Robi's patriarchal authority and enforcements of national difference by boldly declaring her personal freedom: "Do you see now why I've chosen to live in London? Do you see? It's only because I want to be free. [...] Free of *you*! [...] Free of your

bloody culture and free of all of you"(*SL*, 88-89). Ila's transgression reveals the metamorphosed autonomy of the female self. For the parochial Thamma, Ila lives in a country where she doesn't belong only because of material comforts. When the narrator sympathizes with Ila and points out that she desires personal freedom, Thamma scoffs at him: "It's not freedom she wants. [...] She wants to be left alone to do what she pleases: that's all that any whore would want" (*SL*, 89). Thamma strongly disapproves of a freedom that could be purchased for the price of an air ticket because "she too had once wanted to be free; she had dreamt of killing for her freedom" (*SL*, 89). Ila achieves her goal in London beyond the reach of the restrictive, patriarchal Bengali society, but ultimately is stifled between the culture that she rejects and that which rejects her. Her marriage to the promiscuous Nick, instead of assimilating her to Western culture, only perpetuates her marginalization: "Could I ever have imagined, [...], that I, Ila Datta-Chaudhuri, free woman and free spirit, would ever live in that state of squalor where incidents in one's life can be foretold like teasers for a bad television serial" (*SL*,187)? The narrator's sadism, or perhaps vindictiveness, can be presumed in his pinching statement that Ila's "sins have finally come home to roost" (*SL*, 188). The rootless Ila haplessly vacillates between her "London" and "Indian" selves: "You see, you've never understood, you've always been taken in by the way I used to talk, when we were in the college. I only talked like that to shock you, and because you seemed to expect it of me somehow. I never did any of those things: I'm about as chaste, in my own way, as any woman you'll ever meet" (*SL*, 188). When the narrator leaves London, Ila is so much at the end of her emotional tether that she is almost in a state of hysteria. Ila "of whom it was said when we were children, that she and I were so alike that I could have been her twin" baffles the narrator with the "mystery of difference" (*SL*, 31). Ila desires to be free from the double ties of conservatism and patriarchy. For the narrator, freedom exists within the individual, in the mind. His soul has so much assimilated Ila's self that there is a feeling of oneness between the two: "You can never be free of me. [...] If I were to die tomorrow you would not be free of me. You cannot be free of me because *I am within you* [...] just as you are within me" (*SL*, 89, italics original). The boundary between the two selves is a mere shadow line.

Throughout the novel the narrator conceives himself to be the mirror-image of an other. He decides that at the age of eight he looked exactly like

Tridib. When they were children, Ila and the narrator were look-alikes. But the character with whom he desires synchronicity is Nick Price who

> became a spectral presence beside me in my looking glass; growing with me, but always bigger and better, and in some way more desirable. [...] I would look into the glass and there he would be, growing, always faster, always a head taller than me, with hair on his arms and chest and crotch while mine were still pitifully bare. And yet if I tried to look into the face of that ghostly presence, to see its nose, its teeth, its ears, there was never anything there, it had no features, no form; I would shut my eyes and try to see its face, but all I would see was a shock of yellow hair tumbling over a pair of bright blue eyes. (*SL*,50)

Since the narrator conceives Nick as the competitor for Ila's affections, he always imagines Nick standing beside him. Ila tells the narrator that Nick's yellow hair comes over his bright blue eyes. Like Ila, he is also mesmerized by the exotic appeal of the white skin. The narrator, believing in the truth of Ila's narration develops a relationship with an imaginary figure whose presence remains largely undefined. When the narrator's father informs him that Nick intended to travel around the world like his grandfather Lionel Tresawsen, the narrator conceives Nick to be a fellow romantic. Nick thus becomes not only a "spectral presence" (*SL*, 50), but also his "kindred spirit" (*SL*, 52). He believes that Nick has left for Kuwait for his love of travel. In reality, Nick has taken up the job of a chartered accountant in the Middle-East for the lure of money. He is forced to quit his job because he is caught out in a case of embezzlement. Back in London, to cover up the whole truth, he cooks up the story that he returned home voluntarily. It is May who bursts his bubble by pointing out that Nick almost believes the lie that he has conjured: "Nick, isn't it time you stopped lying about this Kuwait business? I was willing to go along with it when it was just a lie meant for other people. But you've begun to believe it yourself, and you shouldn't, you really shouldn't. You ought to be able to stand up and tell the truth" (*SL*, 109). After a series of failed enterprises he comes to sponge on his wealthy wife, Ila. A failure in his professional life, Nick proves to be an unfaithful husband as well developing a succession of affairs. Nick's code of morality differs radically from his sister May's who rams home the point to the narrator: "He's different; he's not like us" (*SL*, 189). The person with whom the narrator had developed a spiritual kinship even before seeing him proves to be the inhabitant of world miles apart from his own. While Ila aspires to be a free spirit with scant regard for territorial and

cultural frontiers, Thamma is an advocate of exclusivist nationalism. Thamma was a college student when terrorist outfits like the "Anushilan Samiti" and the "Jugantar" recruited youngsters as their cadres. She tells the narrator in his childhood the incident of how one of her classmates was arrested by the police. A shy, quiet, bearded boy, the young patriot seemed an unlikely terrorist but he showed great resolve. His impassive face and "clear, direct and challenging" (*SL*, 39) gaze was fixed on the policeman. Inspired by Bagha Jatin and Khudiram Bose's patriotism Thamma wanted to do something for the militant nationalists. She mused that "if only she had known, if only she had been working with him, she would have warned him somehow, she would have saved him, she would have gone to Khulna with him too, and stood at his side, with a pistol in her hands, waiting for the English magistrate" (*SL*, 39). Wholly committed to the nationalist ideal of independent India, Thamma would have done anything to be free from colonial oppression.

Thamma's anti-imperialism determines her conception of nationhood which is very much a part of the entire project of modernity. She believes in the rigidity of national boundaries and its difference from the other. A visionary for a secure national identity, Thamma believes in the necessity for war in the making of a nation and also the inappropriateness of immigration:

> Ila has no right to live there. [...] She doesn't belong there. It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of war and blood-shed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood...War is their religion. That's what it takes to make a country. (*SL*, 77-78)

She urges the narrator to achieve for India a unity which dissolves all religious differences. She herself has discussed the unity in diversity of the country with her Home Science students in school. She spells out her dogma to the narrator that one "can't build a strong country [...] without building a strong body" (*SL*, 8). Thamma's assertion stems out from her celebration of "Ksatriyahood as true Indianness" and her nationalistic zeal to "beat the colonizers at their own game and to regain self-esteem as Indians and as Hindus" (Nandy, 52). Thamma admired Robi not only because he resembled her but also because he is an exemplar of hyper-masculinity or hyper- Ksatriyahood: "he's *strong*; he's not like the rest of you in this country" (*SL*, 35). She disliked Tridib because she believed

that Tridib wasted his time: "For her time was like a toothbrush: it went mouldy if it wasn't used" (*SL*, 4). Thamma's utilitarian conception of time is actually what Meyerhoff calls "the social meaning of time": "A 'waste of time' was sinful – a negation of productivity and value, not a welcome opportunity for leisure and enjoyment" (108). Thamma exhorts her grandson not only to militant nationalism but also to the productive use of time.

Born in Dhaka, Thamma migrated to Mandalay because of her husband's profession. After her husband's death, she joined a school in Calcutta as a teacher. This provided her with some stability in her rootless existence. While in Moulmein and Mandalay she lived in "a succession of railway colonies" (*SL*, 124) which made her life very uneventful. To her "nothing else in that enchanted pagoda-land had seemed real enough to remember (*SL*, 124) apart from hospitals, railway stations and Bengalee Societies. Interestingly, in this she resembles her opposite Ila whose peripatetic lifestyle forbids her to attach herself to any place. The bloodshed of the Partition severs Thamma's connection with her ancestral home in Dhaka. However, a chance meeting with a kin makes her know that her nonagenarian Jethamoshai still lives in their house at Jindabahar Lane in Dhaka. What is more, she is horrified to learn that their whole house has been occupied by Muslim refugees from India. Throughout her life, Thamma never displayed much family feeling. In fact, "she was extremely wary of her relatives; to her they represented an imprisoning wall of suspicion and obligations" (*SL*, 129). However, consanguinity propels her to dismantle this "imaginary barrier" (*SL*, 129) and she decides to travel to Dhaka to bring her Jethamoshai back to Calcutta.

Thamma's journey to Dhaka, her birthplace, initiates her education in the artificiality of the nationalist construct. Her neat and orderly mind seems to be in a quandary when she tries to solve the puzzle "how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality" (*SL*, 152). Thamma has a hard time coming to terms with the technicalities of passports and visas and the politics of international borders. For her, travelling to Dhaka was different in the pre-Partition era when she could "come home to Dhaka" (*SL*, 152) whenever she wanted. The fact that her journey to Dhaka is not only physical but also epistemological is revealed when the young narrator teases his grandmother out of her thoughts: "How could you have 'come' home to Dhaka? You don't know the difference between coming and going" (*SL*,152)! Years later the mature narrator

realizes that his grandmother's journey not only destabilizes her fixed conceptions of "home" but also exposes the faults of a language system:

> Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away from and come back to, and what my grandmother was looking for was a word for a journey which was not a coming or a going at all; a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement." (*SL*,152)

Thaamma's conceptions of home as a place of stability and coherence thus shattered, she receives a further setback when her son exposes the limits of her exclusionary nationalism. Her naïve belief in the existence of borders corresponds with Anderson's conceptualization of the nation as "*limited*" with "finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations" (16). When she expresses her curiosity to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the plane, her son humorously asks her whether she thought that the "border was a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other, like it was in a school atlas" (*SL*,151). When she learns that neither trenches nor soldiers with guns pointing at each other separate the two countries but there are only green fields with no distinct demarcation zones, she discovers the limits of her brand of nationalism:

> But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then – partition and all the killing and everything – if there isn't something in between? (*SL*, 151)

The modern political border, as her son explains to her, doesn't exist on the frontier but in the airport. One crosses it when he fills in the disembarkation cards and the forms demanding one's nationality, etc. This aspect of international boundaries determines the limits of a sovereign authority.

As an old guard nationalist who once dreamt of a new nation, Thamma "believed in the reality of nations and borders" beyond which "existed another reality" (*SL*, 219). The only relationship that existed "between those separate realities was war or friendship"(*SL*, 219). The partitioning of the Bose family house in Dhaka is itself an allegory for Thamma's self-other conceptualization. Whatever exists beyond the other side of the partitioning wall is an inverted image of theirs which is the epitome of normalcy. The upside-down world seems to be a safe place to escape to when problems surface on their own side. The unseen,

unknown other part of the house is a source of immense interest for Thamma and Mayadebi and the "strange thing was that as we grew older even I almost came to believe in our story" (*SL*, 126). This self-other dialectic permeates Thamma's conceptions of nation and nationalism. In her imagining the community of the nation, Thamma is certainly not, in Ila's words a "fascist", but as Tridib sums it up "only a modern middle-class woman":

> All she wanted was a middle-class life in which, like the middle-classes the world over, she would thrive believing in the unity of nationhood and territory, of self-respect and national power: that was all she wanted – a modern middle-class life, a small thing that history had denied her in its fullness and for which she could never forgive it. (*SL*,78)

This patterned orderliness and stability that Thamma seeks is dismantled when she lands in Dhaka airport. The first question she is prompted to ask, confounded by her present surroundings, is "Where's Dhaka? I can't see Dhaka" (*SL*, 193). Thamma's Dhaka is confined in the localized surroundings of her ancestral home in Jindabahar Lane which had "long since vanished in the past" (*SL*, 193). This past/present disjuncture leads to her confusion. Her quest for the idyllic, pre-Partitioned Dhaka of her childhood is projected as a nostalgic return to her ancestral roots. Throughout her life Thamma has contemptuously dismissed nostalgia as a "weakness, a waste of time, that it is everyone's duty to forget the past and look ahead and get on with building the future" (*SL*, 208). Compelled by circumstances, she now realizes the gravity of her predicament that she has "no home but in memory" (*SL*, 194). Thamma's Indian citizenship now confronts with her strong loyalties and affiliations to the solidarity of her ancestral home which she evocatively remembers:

> It had evolved slowly, growing like a honeycomb, with every generation of Boses adding layers and extensions, until it was like a huge, lop-sided pyramid, inhabited by so many branches of the family that even the most knowledgeable amongst them had become a little confused about their relationships. (*SL* 121)

Her alienation from her homeland is pointed out to her by Tridib's teasing remark that "you *are* a foreigner now, you're as foreign here as May – much more than May, for look at her, she doesn't even need a visa to come here" (*SL*, 195). Nevertheless, Thamma perceives her visit to Jindabahar Lane as her "homecoming". Dressed in a white sari with a red border she is "going home as a widow for the first time" (*SL*, 205). After meeting Jethamoshai she emotionally

declares that they have "come home at last" (*SL*, 212). The contradiction between Thamma's going and coming, home and abroad, local and national identities surfaces in her resolution to bring her Jethamoshai to "where he belonged, to her invented country" (*SL*, 137). However, Thamma's glorification of the myth of the nation is punctured by her senile Jethamoshai's stubborn refusal to migrate:

> I don't believe in this India-Shindia. It's all very well, you're going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I'll die here. (*SL*, 215)

Thamma's "home" turns unhomely when the car in which she was returning along with Jethamoshai in a rickshaw is attacked by some frenzied rioters. Tridib rushes out to save the old man but both of them are brutally killed along with the rickshaw-puller Khalil. Thamma's ancestral birthplace is also the city of the fanatic rioters which now is transformed into the split space of home/not-home. Tridib's violent death instills in her a hatred for "them". Hence, when war breaks out with Pakistan in 1965, she donates her gold chain, her late husband's reminiscence, to the war fund: "For your sake; for your freedom. We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out" (*SL*, 237). She takes solace from the fact that it's not a street ambush but an organized war "with tanks and guns and bombs" (*SL*, 237). Throughout the novel Thamma remains an exponent of territorial nationalism and also learns its limitations.

The first-person narrator in *The Shadow Lines* is a dual persona. He is at once a youthful, naïve actor in the novel and its mature, disillusioned narrator. The experiencing and the narrating self exist mostly in two different times and have two different perspectives. As in any character-narrator, the "I" shuttles back and forth between the past and the present, thereby betraying the temporal and psychological distance between his two roles. Hence, "I" the narrator is also the detached commentator of "I" the character, reflecting on past events, putting together pieces. The former plays the "role of the interpretative consciousness in the drama before us" (Goldknopf, 31). The straddling of two times and two perspectives on the part of the character-narrator is the defining feature of the first-person retrospective narrative which *The Shadow Lines* is. The encounter between the "I"'s opposite selves is presented when the narrator reflects on his grandfather's imported table in the Raibajar cellar: "I used to wonder later

whether this was merely a legacy of a child's foreshortened vision: an effect of that difference in perspective which causes all objects recalled from childhood to undergo an illusory enlargement of scale" (*SL*, 48). This is how Ghosh brings out "a natural dualism in the figure of the narrator: he both narrates and experiences, he is both old and young; it is certainly a case of identical persons and yet they are not the same person" (Romberg, 36).

The unnamed first-person narrator "belongs to the represented reality, the fictional world in which the characters live" (Stanzel, 70). Sharing with the characters their ontological status, the narrator is on intimate terms with all the principal characters – Thamma, Tridib, Ila and May. Hence he is able to report on the characters firsthand. But his position as an embodied self imposes on him some constraints which are the inescapable price for "the powerful circumstantiality of eye-witness narration" (Scholes and Kellog, 259). The narrator's physicality restricts him to a particular time and place. To obviate these exigencies, he draws upon the testimony of secondary narrators. Tridib relates to the narrator his experiences in war-time London. Thamma narrates to her grandson her own past in pre-Partitioned Dhaka. Tridib's death in Dhaka is presented from multiple perspectives – the silence of the newspapers and official histories, Robi's narration in the form of a dream years later in London and May's personal version on the eve of the narrator's departure from London. Tridib's pornographic letter to May and her response to it are presented from a third-person perspective. Thamma's visit to her ancestral home in Dhaka is narrated in third-person but through what Henry James defined as a "focus", or "mirror" or "center of consciousness". The entire episode is filtered through the perceptions, awareness and responses of Robi – "Later, one of the details Robi remembered about that day" (*SL*, 205), "Robi scanned the streets as they drove through them, watching alertly for signs of 'trouble'" (*SL*, 205), "He knew then, because of the chill that was spreading outwards from the pit of his stomach, that trouble had come to him at last" (*SL*, 218). Apart from the affirmation of individual subjectivity, there seems to be a craving for an ethical inter-subjective space which transcends the boundaries of separate subjectivities. Meenakshi Mukherjee has succinctly observed that although the narrator appears to be a transparent "lucid reflector", he also functions as an "agentive site" for other lives which "lets different persons, events, places luminously enter his story, and find new

configuration there; or, altering the metaphor, it is possible to see the narrator's consciousness as a porous space that absorbs other lives and other experiences until they leak into each other to reveal a pattern" (140). This multiplicity of narrators makes the novel dialogic.

The narrative moves from a London restaurant in the 1980s, the narrative present, to the Calcutta of the 1950s and 1960s when the narrator was a student and even further back to London in 1939. These multiple narrative strands are held together by the central narrative voice which remembers and seamlessly weaves the narrative in a complex web. Malik's chance remark in 1979 at the Teen Murti House Library in New Delhi triggers the narrator into recollections of the Calcutta riots in 1964. Different temporal and spatial contexts coalesce in his mind as he recalls his relatives and his conversations with them. Similarly, a chance remark in 1981 by Rehman-shaheb, a Bangladeshi restaurant owner in Clapham, transports Robi back to the events in Dhanmundi in Dhaka in 1964 and Tridib's violent death. Meyerhoff argues that "[c]reative imagination is creative recall". Recollection is "an activity, an operation – not the passive reproduction of habitual memory responses. To construct a work of art is to reconstruct the world of experience and the self" (48). The act of creative recall when translated into artistic creation possesses greater unity and continuity than the self in immediate experience. The self thus re-created illustrates the Kantian "synthesis in imagination" leading to the unity of the subject itself. The "true self" that is recaptured from different sense impressions and memories is the self which provides this multiplicity some kind of unity. "Through this act of creative imagination (memory) and organization", asserts Meyerhoff, "the identity of the self is exhibited and demonstrated within the work, though all the elements composing it are characterized by 'distinction and difference'" (48-49). These unique events lodged in memory are metaphysical "essences" for Proust. They disclose the self's functional unity:

> For the most part – and for most people – they are "forgotten", lying dormant, buried in the unconscious; fortunately, they may also float back involuntarily or erupt violently into consciousness, to be seized upon by the *conscious*, creative imagination of the writer as a key to unfolding the unitary structure and continuing pattern of his life. (Meyerhoff, 49)

This is analogous to Thomas Wolfe's efforts "to *organize* the whole series [of impressions] into a harmonious and coherent union" (cited in Meyerhoff, 45).

Hence "A single minute released from the chronological order of time", believes Proust, "has recreated in us the human being similarly released" (*RTP*, II, 996). Furthermore, "All the memories following one after another were condensed into a single substance" (*RTP*, I, 143). The narrative of *The Shadow Lines* works out this philosophy. The sum total of the narrator's life is co-present or simultaneous with his involuntary recollection of the riots in Calcutta in 1964. The fusion of times, places and even persons can best be illustrated when the adult narrator in the cellar of the Prices' house in London recollects the details of his childhood in the cellar in Raibajar. Ila's remark "So here we are, [...] Back in Raibajar" (*SL*, 181) makes the past burst into the present:

> Those empty corners filled up with remembered forms, with the ghosts who had been handed down to me by time: the ghost of the nine-year-old Tridib, sitting on a camp bed, just as I was, his small face intent, listening to the bombs; the ghost of Snipe in that far corner, near his medicine chest, worrying about his dentures; the ghost of the eight-year-old Ila, sitting with me under that vast table in Raibajar. They were all around me, we were together at last, not ghosts at all: the ghostliness was merely the absence of time and distance – for that is all a ghost is, a presence displaced in time. (*SL*, 181)

The boundaries between the past and the present are rendered shadowy in the narrator's private or psychological time, in his consciousness. "Simultaneity", observes Ziolkowski, "is a mode of perception, not of action" (208). Another name for this simultaneity is timelessness.

Temporal simultaneity is complemented by identical spatial realities across the "looking-glass border" (*SL*, 233). London and Berlin, just before World War II are mirror images of each other with the same "exhilaration in the air" (*SL*, 66). Travelling between the two capitals Alan Tresawsen felt that he was "stepping through a looking-glass" (*SL*, 66). Calcutta and Dhaka serve as mirror images of each other during the riots in 1964. The communal frenzy of "Hindu Calcutta' and "Muslim Dhaka" resembles "the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror"(*SL*, 204). The adult narrator, after making a series of connections listening to others' perceptions and experiences, realizes that Tridib and he were in the same predicament in two different cities: "I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other" (*SL*, 233). While in London, the narrator perceptively discerns identity and difference between Gole-Park in Calcutta and a London street-corner:

> And so it was, with exactly the same laminated counters and plastic tables; exactly the same except that it was built into a terrace of derelict eighteenth-century London houses, and there was no paan-shop at the corner, and no Nathu Chaubey but instead, as Nick pointed out, hanging over it was the great steeple of Hawksmoor's Christchurch Spitalfields. (*SL*,100)

The narrator who as a child believed in the reality of nations and space, "that distance separates, that it is a corporeal substance [...] that across the border there existed another reality" (*SL*, 219) realizes at the end of the novel the falsity of these conceptions. The borders between nations in his Bartholomew's Atlas turn into glass, the compartmentalized world turns composite. As he tries to "learn the meaning of distance", he perceives "that within the tidy ordering of Euclidean space, Chiang Mai in Thailand was much nearer Calcutta than Delhi is; that Chengdu in China is nearer than Srinagar is" (*SL*, 232). Since Chiang Mai and Chengdu are located outside the political map of the nation-state the geographical proximity between Calcutta and those two cities is often overlooked. The rigid demarcating lines of Euclidean space which segregate spaces are rendered absolutely meaningless by identical human experiences across the borders. Through the circles that the narrator draws on the atlas the geographical compartmentalization of nations is obfuscated as they occupy one transnational space. The extent to which the architectonics of space dominated Ghosh's imagination is revealed in his confession to Hawley that his "ambition was to do with space what Proust had done with time: that is, to make completely different instances of a continuum immanent in each other" (8-9). The "silent communion" (Anderson, 6) which glues individuals living miles apart from one another across territorially demarcated spaces makes the borders that separate them "shadow lines".

The narrator's belief in the absoluteness of cartographic divisions thus shattered, he learns that the separatist logic of frontiers cannot enforce cultural difference. Ironically what establishes the identical nature of realities on both sides of the border between India and Pakistan is self-destructive violence. The sacred relic known as the Mui-i-Mubarak disappears in Srinagar and riots break out in Calcutta and Dhaka. The administrators who drew the boundaries between India and Pakistan believed in the "enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had erected their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland"

(*SL*, 233). The narrator discerns a profound "yet-undiscovered irony" in the political separation:

> the simple fact that there had never been a moment in the four-thousand-year-old history of that map, when the places we know as Dhaka and Caalcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lives – so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when 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. (*SL*, 233)

Paradoxically, the communal riot indicates the deep emotional involvement of the Hindus and the Muslims alike. The communally constructed national border which separates the two nation-states fails to split the original Indian Self, which was created by the plenitude of religious communities, the two largest of which are the Hindus and the Muslims. The animosity between them exists only in the nationalist discourse; in practical reality there are people of both communities on either side of the border. The national and communal identities mix with one another. What palpably exists on the other side of the border is not an other, but rather the divided communal Self.

Sudhir Kakar, in his influential book *The Colours of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion and Conflict*, distinguishes between pre-colonial "religious" conflicts and post-colonial "communal" violence in the Indian sub-continent. While religion is "a matter of personal faith and reverence for a particular set of icons, rituals, and dogmas", asserts Kakar, communalism entails one's "exclusive attachment to his or her community combined with an active hostility against other communities which share its geographical and political space" (13). The overarching identities as "Muslim" and "Hindu" were highly charged by the divisiveness of the Partition of 1947, "the most momentous event in the shaping of Hindu-Muslim relations in independent India"(37). The bitter animosity between these two communities is an off-shoot of the imperialist policy of divide and rule by setting one against the other. The presentation of the post-Partition riots in Calcutta expatiates Kakar's observations. The young narrator's school-bus is more than half-empty as the majority of the students are confined at home because trouble is apprehended in Calcutta. Rumour spreads that "they" have poisoned Calcutta's water supply. This incident echoes the rumours in war-time London that German aeroplanes were dropping toffee-tins "to demoralize the population by getting at the children" (*SL*, 184). The children "huddled together" (*SL*, 189) in

the bus in Calcutta immediately comprehend that the vague identification "they" refer to the Muslims. The "us" and "them" binaries are crystallized when their own friend Montu is perceived as an "other" because he is a Muslim. When the adult narrator recalls the incident he reflects on the extent to which children had internalized this self/other split:

> I remember we did not ask him any questions – not who 'they' were, nor why 'they' had poisoned their own water. We did not need to ask any questions; we knew the answers the moment he had said it: it was a reality that existed only in the saying, so when you heard it said, it did not matter whether you believed it or not – it only mattered that it had been said at all. (*SL*, 199-200)

The riots transform the city. The frightening sound of voices alternate with random moments of silence to produce "the authentic sound of chaos" (*SL*, 201). When the children return home their well-known streets seem completely unfamiliar. Even the positioning of a rickshaw at a street-corner expresses a threat: "had it been put there to keep Muslims in or Hindus out? At that moment we could read the disarrangement of our universe in the perfectly ordinary angle of an abandoned rickshaw" (*SL*, 203). The narrator's "fear" of the city that "had turned against us" (*SL*, 204) is described thus:

> It is a fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can become, suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world – not language, not food, not music – it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror. (*SL*, 204)

The contention that riots are exceptional to South Asia is repeated in *In An Antique Land*. Not to speak of communal tensions, micro nationalist factions subvert the myth of the homogeneity of the Indian nation-state. Robi reflects on how terrorist and separatist outfits in Assam, the north-east, Punjab, Sri Lanka, Tripura utter the rhetoric of freedom to fragment the nation: "And then I think to myself, why don't they draw thousand of little lines through the whole subcontinent and give every place a new name? What would it change? It's a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide a memory? (*SL*,247). This clearly resonates with problems of contemporary India, where the tension between the state and the numerous ethnicities is evident. The state uses its power

to keep the nation together as a political concept, while the various religious communities tear it apart.

Territorial space can be demarcated by lines but the collective unconscious remains indivisible. The separatist strategies of the politics of national boundaries epitomized by the Partition fail to suppress syncretic possibilities. The ecumenical Hazratbal shrine is revered by Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists alike that challenges the "Christian sense of the necessity of quarantine between doctrines". The synthesizing quality of the shrine is stressed when the theft of the relic brings about "a spontaneous show of collective grief". Maulana Masoodi, "an authentic hero, forgotten and unsung today as any purveyor of sanity" (*SL*,225-226), united the various Kashmiri communities in their demonstrations. When the relic is recovered, the Kashmiris erupt in joy. However, this exemplary secular tolerance and cultural syncretism is marred by a violent riot in distant Khulna. But "[a]s always, there were innumerable cases of Muslims in East Pakistan giving shelter to Hindus, often at the cost of their own lives, and equally in India, of Hindus sheltering Muslims" (*SL*,229-230). Unfortunately, no Martyr's Memorials were erected for these unsung ordinary people. Just as the partition of the Bose family in Dhanmundi fails to prevent relatives from being involved with each other, so also the arbitrary division of the country fails to slice one community apart from the other. Ghosh himself experienced a similar situation when riots broke out in Delhi in November, 1984 after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. What he remembers is not only "the horror of violence" but also "the affirmation of humanity [...] the risks that perfectly ordinary people are willing to take for one another" (*II*, 61). Such people demonstrate "the indivisible sanity that binds people to each other independently of their governments" (*SL*, 230). Eventually, *The Shadow Lines* "became a book not about any one event but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who live through them" (*II*, 60). Jethamoshai, the lone, left behind member of his family, is looked after by a Muslim rickshaw-puller Khalil. His children look up to the old man as their grandfather. Theirs is a family based not on kinship but on love and solidarity, the very basis of community formation. Ghosh's stance on inter-community solidarity and his assertion of humanity exposes the parochialism of nationalism. The dangerous potential for violence and aggression in the creation of exclusivist collective identities is succinctly explained by Regina Schwartz: "Imaginary

identity as an act of distinguishing and separating from others, of boundary making and line drawing, is the most fundamental act of violence we commit"(187). Celebrating "the complex web of relationships between people that cut across nations and generations", *The Shadow Lines* thus becomes, argues Robert Dixon, "a fictional critique of classical anthropology's model of discrete cultures and the associated ideology of nationalism"(20).

In Ghosh, the male protagonists are rationalists/idealists. Conversely, the female protagonists are pragmatists/humanists. They are more successful than their male counterparts because they are more in touch with life's reality. May occupies a distinctive position in Ghosh's gallery of women characters which include Zindi in *The Circle of Reason*, Dolly in *The Glass Palace*, Nilima in *The Hungry Tide*. As an integral being, May is a champion of humanity. She tirelessly collects funds in London streets for providing housing to the earthquake victims in Central America. In Raibajar, she dismisses the narrator's grandfather's huge imported wooden table as "utterly useless", as a "worthless bit of England" (*SL*, 49). She wonders that the amount of money squandered on the table would have provided shelter for a lot of people. She displays courage and compassion in killing the dying dog in order to spare it from more pain. But the defining moment in May's humanism comes in the narrow Jindabahar Lane when the hostile rioters set upon the old man and his rickshaw-puller. While Thamma, the old man's blood relation, wants her driver to drive away, the determined May jumps out of the car to defend them: "Your grandmother screamed at me. She said I didn't know what I was doing, and I'll get everyone killed. I didn't listen; I was a heroine" (*SL*, 250). In the scuffle that follows, Tridib is killed. For seventeen years after the incident May holds herself responsible for Tridib's death. Unlike Tridib, she never felt insecure in the mob because "they wouldn't have touched me, an English memsahib" (*SL*, 251). She finally realizes that Tridib "gave himself up; it was a sacrifice" (*SL*, 251-252). If her self asserted itself in Dhaka – "I was a heroine" (*SL*, 250) – after the incident she becomes selfless. She is committed to her altruistic mission, a commitment which even intrudes into the private spaces of her domestic life as she sleeps on the floor: "After all, this is how most people in the world sleep. I merely thought I'd throw in my lot with the majority" (*SL*, 158). While Tridib's death hardens Thamma's rigid binaries of "us" and "them", May's attitude towards life becomes transnational as she tries to fuse the

Self/Other dialectic. This fusion reaches its zenith in her sexual union with the narrator. Aziz and Fielding's friendship in *A Passage to India* came to a sad end because Aziz could not purge his anticolonial spirit: "'Down with the English anyhow. That's certain. Clear out, you fellows, double quick, I say. We may hate one another, but we hate you most. If I don't make you go, Ahmed will, Karim will, if it's fifty five-hundred years we shall get rid of you, yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishmen into the sea, and then [...] you and I shall be friends"(Forster, 317). May and the narrator meet as free citizens transcending the divisions of colonizer/colonized, white/non-white, self/other. Through his union with May which melts all boundaries, the narrator is granted "the glimpse of [...] a final redemptive mystery" (*SL*, 252), the mystery of the depths of human experience and the achievement of the self's reciprocal relationship with the other.

Chapter Four

Tiny Threads, Gigantic Tapestries

In An Antique Land

There has since the beginning of human existence always been movement, migration and settlement in new areas; for as long as is known and in most parts of the world, individual places have been open to, and partly constituted by, their contacts with "outside". Interconnection is not new, and diasporas are certainly not only a feature of the recent past. — Doreen Massey and Pat Jess, *A Place in the World: Places, Cultures and Globalization*

Cultures are not impermeable; just as Western science borrowed from Arabs, they had borrowed from India and Greece. Culture is never just a matter of ownership, of borrowing and lending with absolute debtors and creditors, but rather of appropriations, common experiences, and interdependencies of all kinds among different cultures. This is a universal norm. — Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

Amitav Ghosh's third novel, *In An Antique Land* (1992), is too protean to be pigeonholed. Hence, the novel's genre has triggered an intense controversy. Even Ghosh's innocuous claim that "it's not a novel. I didn't make up a single word of it" (Chambers, "The Absolute Essentialness of Conversations", 28) has been controverted. Homi Bhabha for one considers it "philosophically" as "a novel" (Chambers, "The Absolute Essentialness of Conversations", 28). Similarly Krishna Sen calls it a "large and complex novel" (vi). More forthright is Shyam S. Agarwalla who avers that *In An Antique Land* is an "epistolary fiction on the one hand, and, on the other, a contemporary novel" (164). John C. Hawley, on the contrary, believes that the "book is not recognizable as a novel". For him it is "a new genre, something that blends an anthropological record with a travelogue, a diary, and perhaps some imagined sections" (89). Padmini Mongia's contention that "*In An Antique Land* melds many genres" (74) is well supported by Claire Chambers who asserts that it is "a text that straddles the generic borderlines between fact, fiction, autobiography, history, anthropology, and travel book"

("Anthropology as Cultural Translation",1). As a braided narrative, *In An Antique Land* is too generically composite to be easily categorized.

Like its form, the novel's informing spirit too sharply divides its critics. While for Subha Tiwari the novel is "a comment on the growing trend of consumerism and its impact on the developing world"(48), for Sharmila Guha Majumdar "one of the predominant themes is religion"(184). Gauri Viswanathan believes that Ghosh's effort to recuperate the syncretic religious and cultural histories in Egypt and India has a "homogenizing" tendency which denies the historical reality of religious differences. For her, Ghosh's work "cannot get beyond nostalgia to offer ways of dealing with what is, after all, an intractable political problem" (1). As a counterblast to this Neelam Srivastava asserts that Ghosh's "retrieval of the syncretic history of the Indian Ocean is not merely nostalgic, and quite the opposite of a homogenizing multi-culturalism, as Viswanathan suggests" (46). Furthermore, "Ghosh's objective was not that of making a politically radical statement", continues Srivastava, "but rather of developing the ethnographic genre in the direction of a narrative and intersubjective cultural account" (46). This neatly polarized critical response to the same author and to the same book reflects upon the validity of literary criticism as such. While T.K.Ghosh hails *In An Antique Land* as a "close and extensive research work" (152), Leela Gandhi takes the novel down a peg or two on the grounds that the "somewhat unreadable book" "collapses under the cumulative weight of its three-hundred and forty-nine end notes" (192). Granted its controversiality, the profundity of *In An Antique Land* remains to be demonstrated.

The two parallel narratives in *In An Antique Land* create a dialectic between an idyllic, medieval Middle-East and a contemporary trouble-torn Arab world. While the primary narrative focuses on the narrator's fieldwork experiences with the fellaheen in contemporary Egypt, the secondary narrative reconstructs an obscure, fragile subaltern subject, the slave of MS H.6. The two narratives presenting parallel human experiences are intricately interwoven. Distant temporal epochs, modern and medieval histories are thus seamlessly fused in a rich tapestry. The Prologue strikes the keynote to the novel as the narrator-historian introduces the elusive object of his research – the identity of a medieval Indian slave to a Tunisian Jewish merchant Abraham Ben Yiju: "The Slave of MS

H.6 first stepped upon the stage of modern history in 1942. His was a brief debut, in the obscurest of theatres, and he was scarcely out of the wings before he was gone again – more a prompter's whisper than a recognizable face in the cast" (*In An Antique Land*, 13). The slave is initially mentioned in a letter by a merchant Khalaf ibn Ishaq to his friend Ben Yiju in 1148 when the greatest European army of Crusaders assembled around Damascus. This medieval letter received scholarly attention in an article by E. Strauss in 1942, when another European armed congregation laid siege in the Middle-East. The past-present parallel cannot go unnoticed. The second medieval document in which the slave is mentioned was published thirty-one years later but in that the slave receives an elevated stature for "he has earned himself a footnote"(*IAAL*,18). The letter of Khalaf ibn Ishaq describes Ben Yiju's Indian slave as a "business agent, a respected member of his household" (*IAAL*, 18). Reflecting on the textual evidence of the slave's existence, the narrator is fascinated by the accident of history that "those barely discernible traces that ordinary people leave upon the world happen to have been preserved. It is nothing less than a miracle that anything is known about him at all" (*IAAL*, 17).The slave of Ben Yiju belonged to a moment in history when

> the only people for whom we can even begin to imagine properly human, individual, existences are the literate and the consequential, the wazirs and the sultans, the chroniclers and the priests – the people who had the power to inscribe themselves physically upon time. (*IAAL*, 16-17)

The slave is a paradigmatic subaltern whose experiences are to be reconstructed from the fragments available to the narrator-historian. An eclectic that he is, Ghosh, while recovering the subaltern consciousness, fuses the Derridean textual "traces" with the "properly human, individual, existences" (*IAAL*, 17). Robert Dixon explicitly formulates that Ghosh deploys "the lexicons of both liberal humanism and post-structuralism, though without allowing his writing to be affiliated with either" (27). The humanist Ghosh is sensitive to point out that though the medieval correspondence between Ishaq and Yiju is about merchandise "the letter's spirit is anything but mercenary: it is lit with a warmth that Goitein's translation renders still alive and glowing, in cold English print" (*IAAL*, 18). By piecing together the textual fragments, the narrator-historian imaginatively reconstructs a sub-culture of these modest, medieval traders providing an

alternative to the official history of statesmen and priests. The Prologue ends with an autobiographical note that gives a new dimension to the narrative:

> [...] the next year, 1980, I was in Egypt, installed in a village called Lataifa, a couple of hours journey to the south-east of Alexandria.
>
> I knew nothing then about the Slave of MSH.6 except that he had given me a right to be there, a sense of entitlement. (*IAAL*, 19)

The Oxford-trained Indian anthropologist's quest for the slave's trail in Egypt not only provides an edifice for cross-cultural dialogue, but also ties together the two threads of the book. By acknowledging the erased histories of the medieval oriental world, the narrator embarks on a project to affirm the existence of this Indian slave of antiquity who virtually becomes the narrator-historian's second self.

The narrator-historian undertakes a daunting academic enterprise to track down the slave's traces. While unearthing the slave's and his master's origins the narrator discovers a vital medieval, cosmopolitan world that outdates contemporary notions of cosmopolitanism. The pre-colonial world is marked by a "greater freedom of movement" and inclusiveness unknown to the modern, exclusive, legally demarcated nation-states: "In the 12th century, people developed a much more sophisticated language of cultural negotiation than we know today. They were able to include different cultures in their lives, while maintaining what was distinct about themselves" (Ghosh, "Lessons From the 12th Century", 52). The fact that huge quantities of Chinese pottery and rich fragments of Indian textiles have been found in medieval Fustat lends credence to the thesis that culture transcends national boundaries. As the "entrepot" that linked the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, medieval Fustat occupied a "pivotal role in the global economy": "the juncture of some of the most important trade routes in the known world and the nucleus of one of the richest and most cosmopolitan cities on earth" (*IAAL*, 38). These vibrant movements are the reason why even the name of Egypt circulated in various countries giving it an alternate linguistic history. *Masr* is

> the name by which the country has been known, in its own language, for at least a millennium, and most of the cultures and civilizations with which it has old connections have accepted its own self-definition. The languages of India, for example, know Masr by variations of its Arabic name; 'Mishor' in Bengali, 'Misar' in Hindi and Urdu. (*IAAL*, 32)

While the peace-loving Asian countries were champions of cultural assimilation, Western cultural institutions maintained rigid boundaries by creating the "other" against which Europe could define itself: "Europe has always insisted on knowing the country not its own terms, but as a dark mirror for itself" (*IAAL*, 32). Phrases like "Egyptian darkness" and "Egyptian bondage" (*IAAL*, 32) recur in English language. Major European languages derive their name for Egypt from "the Greek Ægyptos", a term related to "the word 'Copt', the name generally used for Egypt's indigenous Christians" (*IAAL*, 32). Words like "gypsy" and "Gitano" are derived from the word "Egyptian" (*IAAL*, 33). The narrator caps it off with his assertion that "Europe's apparently innocent 'Egypt' [...] is almost as much a weapon as a word" (*IAAL*, 33). The demarcation between the Orient and the Occident is therefore, in the words of Said, "less a fact of nature than [...] a fact of human production" ("Orientalism reconsidered", 2). The cleavage between the pre-colonial East and the colonial West is thus gradually built up.

Ben Yiju followed a well-marked trail of medieval Jewish travellers and joined the Palestinian congregation in Babylon. These vibrant, flourishing traders formed a multicultural, mercantile civilization without any structures of power relationships. It is one of history's grim ironies that "unlike others of that time who have left their mark on history, the members of this community were not born to privilege and entitlement; they were neither aristocrats nor soldiers nor professional scholastics" (*IAAL*, 56). Hence, they are History's unrecognized heroes. The members of the "Ben Ezra" congregation created a "Geniza" or a storehouse to preserve all sorts of documents and "to prevent the accidental desecration of any written form of God's name" (*IAAL*, 56). By "largely fortuitous circumstances" (*IAAL*, 56) this geniza was undisturbed for more than seven hundred years. Hence it emerged as the greatest storehouse of medieval documents. The Geniza documents testify to medieval syncretism. The researcher learns that the Middle-Eastern Jews and the Muslims used the same name for God, "Allah". The language in which the documents were written is a hybrid one, Judaeo-Arabic, "a colloquial dialect of medieval Arabic, written in the Hebrew script" (*IAAL*, 101). This is the dialect in the Egyptian Delta villages of Lataifa and Nashawy in which the narrator lived. The Geniza documents reflect the multi-cultural spirit of the medieval transcontinental traders. In the late 17th century, a fever of Egyptomania gripped Europe by which "European culture was able to

manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said, *Orientalism*, 3). Egypt became a prey to the Enlightenment's concepts of knowledge and discovery and by the time when the Suez Canal was constructed in 1864, "the intercourse between power and the writing of history" (*IAAL*, 82) was complete. The Geniza was emptied of its manuscripts which were dispersed in various European libraries especially Cambridge. What coupled with scientifically advanced techniques of Western research is a subsidiary tale of greed and dishonesty which led to the drain of wealth. Even the native scholars failed to appreciate the ancient "Islamic high culture of Masr" (*IAAL*, 95). So complete was this uprooting that "not a single scrap or shred of paper" (*IAAL*, 95) remained in the Geniza to remind Masr of her hallowed past. Thus, "having come to Fustat from the far corners of the known world, a second history of travel carried the documents even further" (*IAAL*, 95). This was symptomatic of the colonizers who nourished "a view of the world in which the interests of the powerful defined necessity, while the demands of the poor appeared as greed" (*IAAL*, 95). The movement of the archives erased all evidences of Egypt's ancient heterogeneous culture and this historical amnesia determined the country's present: "It was as though the borders that were to divide Palestine several decades later had already been drawn, through time rather than territory, to allocate a choice of Histories" (*IAAL*, 95). The incompleteness of historical records and the manipulative nature of history to meet a particular interest are made explicit here.

Chance plays a great role in *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines*. In *In An Antique Land* too, the narrator's research on the life and times of Abraham Ben Yiju hinges on a providential discovery of a crucial historical document: "By an extraordinary coincidence it so happens that the letter has survived and is currently lodged [...] in the University of Cambridge" (*IAAL*, 177). By working on the fragmentary evidences, the narrator learns that the Rabbi Ben Yiju was a respected scholar well versed in religious doctrines for whom the "opportunities offered by the eastern trade" (*IAAL*, 154) was irresistible. Ben Yiju started his career as an apprentice to Madmun who regarded him as a part of his family. The talented Jew soon established himself in Aden, yet "curiously enough", in "a deviation from the usual pattern of trader's travels" (*IAAL*, 159),

Ben Yiju migrated to the Malabar coast in 1132 and returned twenty years later. Pressing into service all his analytical skills, the narrator surmises from a "cryptic letter" (*IAAL*, 160) that Ben Yiju travelled to Mangalore to escape a blood feud arising from a matter of unpaid taxes. The dispute was of course amicably settled later. In Mangalore, Ben Yiju granted freedom to a slave girl named Ashu and later married her. She belonged to the matrilineal Nair community along the Malabar coast. Concubinage and sexual liaison were common practices in medieval times and India was "notable for the ease of its sexual relations" (*IAAL*, 228), but the researcher is convinced that the "overriding and more important consideration" (*IAAL*, 228) must have been love. Yet, this alternative history that the narrator creates is obfuscated by his own tongue-in-cheek observation that "[i]f I hesitate to call it love it is only because the documents offer no certain proof" (*IAAL*, 230). The demarcating line between history and fiction is confused with the plausibility of the narrator's own interpretation. Anyway, Ben Yiju's decision to marry a girl disregarding all distinctions of race, class, social position, and creed speaks of a liberal outlook far ahead of his times.

When medieval India proved to be a haven of multiculturalism, Europe was a seething cauldron. Triggered by "a frenzy of religious fervour" (*IAAL*, 300) because of widespread massacre of Jews, Europe was preparing for another Crusade. North Africa witnessed a brutal killing of a hundred thousand Christians and Jews by the Almohads. Many Jews converted to Christianity to save their lives. Ben Yiju's homeland Ifriqiya was demolished by the Christian Sicilian armies and the region was ravaged by disease and famine. His family had, however, escaped and settled in Sicily unknown to him in distant Mangalore. Consanguinity compelled Ben Yiju to reunite with his brothers and he urged them to join him in Aden. To strengthen his bonds with them Ben Yiju decided to marry his daughter off to one of his nephews. After many twists in fortune, his nephew Surur married his daughter Sitt al-Dar in 1156 in Fustat. After years of a miserable life in exile the "material and scholarly riches" of Egypt "shone like a beacon"(*IAAL*, 325) for Ben Yiju's family. Finally, Ben Yiju and his kins went back to their homeland; Ashu never left India. The narrator is confounded with the final years of Ben Yiju's life about which there are "many conceivable endings" (*IAAL*, 328). While the story goes that he died in Egypt after his daughter's marriage, "the most pleasing" (*IAAL*, 328) conjecture is that he returned to Ashu

in the Malabar. However, there are no historical documents to support the researcher's assumptions.

Having recovered the lost traces of Abraham Ben Yiju, the narrator-historian now tries to unravel the Slave's identity. The "slave of MS H.6" exists in the waste-bin of history when the narrator locates him in scattered fragments. Goitein's translated version of Khalaf ibn Ishaq's letter to Ben Yiju in 1139 renders the slave's name as "bama", a diminutive of "Brahma". Researching on other medieval documents, the narrator discovers that three characters "B-M-H" (or "B-M-A" since in Arabic 'H' is not a consonant but an open vowel) (*IAAL*,246), figure prominently in the slave's mysterious name. Desisting from Goitein's contention that "Bama" is derived from "Brahma", the narrator ultimately solves this pressing linguistic riddle:

> After puzzling over those three characters for a long time, one last possibility suggested itself to me. In Judæo-Arabic (as in Arabic) a doubled letter is often represented by a single character. It was possible then that the single'M' in the name was actually doing duty for two of its kind. If that were so, it would mean that there were actually four letters in the name 'B-M-M-A'. If I then filled in a short vowel after the first letter, the result was 'Bomma' or "Bamma', names which I knew to be common in certain parts of India. (*IAAL*, 249)

Discussing the slave's identity with an expert on local folklore the researcher learns that the slave belonged to a matrilineal community of Tulunad with an indigenous culture and local forms of worship, the Bhuta-cult. His contention that the Slave's name was not a derivative of "Brahma" is vindicated by the expert as "in all likelihood it was a dimunitive of 'Berme', the figure who stood at the pinnacle of the Tuluva pantheon of Bhuta-spirits" (*IAAL*, 254). The indigenous culture of Tulunad predates Brahminism, "the standard-bearers of the Pan-Indian Hindu tradition" (*IAAL*, 252). Later with the rise of the overarching Brahminical influence, the Tulu deity Berme was gradually assimilated to the Sanskritic deity "Brahma". With his elusive identity thus established Bomma "finally came of age and was ready at last to become a protagonist in his own story" (*IAAL*, 254).

The relationship between the matrilineally descended Tulu slave and his patriarchal Jewish master completely differed from the European conceptions of slavery. The medieval idea of slavery confounded "contemporary conceptions, both of servitude and of its mirrored counter-image, individual freedom" (*IAAL*, 259). In the medieval Middle-East and north India "slavery" was a career opening,

a mode of recruitment into the army and the bureaucracy. In the mercantile world too, the hierarchies were equally flexible. Beginning as an agent or an apprentice, a slave not only obtained manumission but also a share of the firm's profits. In the religious sphere, slavery was a spiritual metaphor for the devotee's quest for God. For the Vachanakara saint-poets and the Sufi mystics, slavery "the paradoxical embodiment of perfect freedom" (*IAAL*, 261) represented self-transcendence and the dissolving of all differences:

> through the transforming power of metaphor the poets became their Lord's servants and lovers, androgynous in their longing; slaves, searching for their master with a passion that dissolved selfhood, wealth, caste and gender, indeed, difference itself. (*IAAL*, 260-261)

The champions of perfect personal devotion and human commitment, spiritual movements such as Sufism and the Bhakti are "subversive counter-image[s]" (*IAAL*, 263) of orthodox Islam and Hinduism. They celebrated the possibility of human connections transcending cultural differences. Such was the impact of the Sufi conceptions of spiritual extinction in a transcendent power that even the bloodthirsty conqueror Sultan Mahmud of Ghazani underwent a "miraculous spiritual transformation" (*IAAL*, 262). In the medieval world, the relation between the slave and the master was not structured on any power relations but on a reciprocal recognition of each other. The relationship between Ben Yiju and Bomma was devoid of any colonial connotations of slavery. Their "arrangement was probably more that of patron and client than master and slave, as that relationship is now understood" (*IAAL*, 259). Bomma, in course of time, grew in stature as Ben Yiju's business agent in Aden and assumed the title of "Shaikh".

In his academic explorations along the Malabar coast, the narrator-historian learns about the Magavira community and their connections with foreign merchants. Their deity, known as the Bobbariya –bhuta, is a prime example of religious syncretism. The deity is legendarily considered to be the spirit of a Muslim trader who died at sea. When the narrator visits a Bhuta-temple at Mangalore with a Jesuit friend he witnesses how a marginalized community, once relegated to the peripheries of the Hindu order but now completely transformed socially and economically, uses politics to lay "claim to the future, in the best tradition of liberalism, by discovering a History to replace the past" (*IAAL*, 273). Medieval religious hybridism is now replaced by the polemics of a fundamentalist

Hindu political organization, "an upper-caste group notorious for its anti-Muslim rhetoric" (*IAAL*, 273). True to the spirit of postmodernity the old structure of the temple is demolished and a new one is created in its place: "it had become a real Hindu temple, and the main place in it was now reserved for Vishnu, the most Brahminical of gods" (*IAAL*, 274). In an interesting parallel, the Synagogue in Egypt, originally built in the eleventh century, has been in need of constant renovation to be rescued "from the assaults of Time" (*IAAL*, 58). The difference, of course, lies elsewhere. While every trace of the past has been erased from the Geniza after the documents were dispersed, the past still makes its "presence" felt in the temple at Mangalore. The "spirit" of the Bobbariya-bhuta was placed beside the image of the Hindu god Vishnu albeit in a "wholly different guise" (*IAAL*, 274). The narrator discerns the medieval religious hybridism which has escaped the watchful eyes of the Hindu fundamentalists: "The past had revenged itself on the present: it had slipped the spirit of an Arab Muslim trader past the watchful eyes of Hindu zealots and installed it within the Sanskritic pantheon" (*IAAL*,). The narrator puts a premium on the medieval tradition of personal devotion which has continuously confronted the "hierarchical ideology of caste with a critique of millenarian power" (*IAAL*, 274).

The mercantile world of Ben Yiju in medieval Mangalore dissolved social, religious and geographical divisions. Madmun endeavoured a joint venture between himself and three traders belonging to different social and geographical origins: "one a Muslim, one a Gujarati Vania, and the third a member of the landowning caste of Tulunad" (*IAAL*, 278). A mark of this multiculturalism is the creation of a "trading argot, or an elaborated pidgin language" (*IAAL*,) which circulated amongst the traders coming from diverse linguistic regions. But the cultural bonhomie that brought the Jewish Ben Yiju, his Nair wife Ashu and the Indian slave Bomma close to each other came to an abrupt end with the advent of the Portuguese trader Vasco da Gama in 1498:

> Within a few years of that day the knell had been struck for the world that had brought Bomma, Ben Yiju and Ashu together, and another age had begun in which the crossing of their paths would seem so unlikely that its very possibility would all but disappear from human history. (*IAAL*, 286)

The arrival of the Europeans on the Indian waters destroyed the pre-existing relations among the Arab and the Indian traders. Merchants had traded on the

Indian Ocean respecting the laws of peace uninfluenced by the terrestrial military ambitions. The Portuguese brought with them a completely different language of dominance and autonomy based on racial and religious superciliousness. The military superiority of the Portuguese altered the peaceful ambience of the Indian Ocean just as the British gunboats destroyed the quiet, cosmopolitan world of al-Ghazira in *The Circle of Reason*. Interestingly, the European historians regarded the peaceful co-existence of the Indians and the Egyptians as "a lack, or failure, one that invited the intervention of Europe" (*IAAL*, 287). Far from conceding to Western representations the narrator rewrites it, underlining the cultural distinctions between the Occident and the Orient: "the peaceful traditions of the oceanic trade may have been, in a quite inarticulate way, the product of a rare cultural choice – one that may have owed a great deal to the pacifist customs and beliefs of the Gujarati Jains and Vanias who played such an important part in it" (*IAAL*, 287). Anyway the "unquenchable, demonic thirst" (*IAAL*, 288) of European colonialism erased the intertwined histories of India and Egypt. But Mangalore does not treat its "lost history" with "crippling melancholy" (*IAAL*, 245) because its connections with the Arabs have not been severed:

> Its ancient connections with the Arab world have bequeathed it a more useful legacy than a mere collection of artifacts: thousands of its residents are now employed in the Persian Gulf, and its suburbs are awash with evidence of the extravagant spending of its expatriates. (*IAAL*, 245)

The continuities between the past and the present have remained unabated and the vestiges of that rich cosmopolitan world still survive albeit in a different dimension: "throughout north India, crystallized sugar is still known as misri in commemoration of traders like Ben Yiju and the tastes they imported from Masr" (*IAAL*, 269). The narrator thus completely demolishes the cliché that cosmopolitanism is the exclusive fruit of European expansionism. The schema of historicism which puts the West at the centre of everything – "first in Europe, then elsewhere" (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 7) – is thus deconstructed.

While the narrator is a subversive historian in search of an elusive historical figure, he is also an Oxford-trained Indian anthropologist engaged in fieldwork in an Egyptian village. In Egypt, he researches the slave's life in the Alexandrian archives; leaving Egypt, he reconstructs his own research experiences and seamlessly interweaves the two. The present shapes his perspective from

which he looks at the past. By forging a tenuous connection between the 12th century Indian slave in Egypt and himself, the narrator, in the words of James Clifford, maps "older connections between India and Egypt, trade and travel relations which preceded and partly bypassed the world's violent polarization into West and East, empire and colony, developed and backward" (*Routes*, 5). To achieve this, the narrator conflates within himself the roles of the ethnographer as a "describer-translator of custom" and the anthropologist as a "builder of general theories about humanity" (Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 28), and demolishes traditional assumptions about them. Amitav Ghosh repudiates anthropology as "a kind of hegemonic voice", "an authoritative" and "authoritarian voice" (Chambers, "The Absolute Essentialness of Conversations", 29). Despite his training in it, anthropology disenchants him because it reduces people "into abstractions and makes them into [...] statistical irregularities" (Aldama, 86). His "real interest is in the predicament of individuals" (Aldama, 86-87). Hence, far from rewriting the local culture of the Egyptian fellaheen from a narrative distance and observing his native informants as a homogenized "they", the narrator, Amitab, relates to them with a profound ease and intimacy that conduces to his narrative's lifelikeness. In his interview with Claire Chambers, Ghosh acknowledges "the absolute essentialness of conversations to any kind of narrative" ("The Absolute Essentialnes of Conversations", 28). Dismantling the self/other dialectic, the narrator relinquishes his superior epistemological position as the central observing and narrating authority and is in turn questioned and condemned about his own religious and cultural practices by the villagers. The narrative thus becomes dialogic in form.

Deviating from the tropes of traditional ethnography, the narrative begins *in media res* with the narrator already a lodger in a Lataifa household. Descriptions of the narrator's journey to Egypt or the initial feelings of unfamiliarity are consciously eschewed. On the contrary, there is already a feeling of comradeship. Abu Ali, a small businessman with a bullying personality, "on his own initiative, had assumed the role of surrogate father as well as landlord" (*IAAL*, 24), but the narrator feels somewhat unhappy in his house. He feels "secure" (*IAAL*, 39) in his friendship with Shaikh Musa. Such is the feeling of camaraderie that the narrator feels with Shaikh Musa that after sharing a meal with his family from a single tray he feels that he has "just crossed an invisible

barrier" (*IAAL*, 40). But the researcher in Amitab already discerns complexities within this "labyrinth of relationships" (*IAAL*, 53). Although Shaikh Musa obliquely cautions the narrator about Abu Ali, he never voices his criticism directly. Descending from the same genealogy Abu Ali and Shaikh Musa are bound by consanguinity. Within the latter's own family, education created "an unbridgeable gap" (*IAAL*, 42) between his two sons, Ahmed and Hasan. An educated man and hence a "mowazzaf" (*IAAL*, 42), Ahmed worked as a clerk in a factory near Damanhour. Hasan, an educated fellah, worked on his father's land. His strong resemblance to his father and their shared world-view created "a special bond" (*IAAL*, 42) between the father and the son. Travelling around Lataifa and Nashawy, the narrator observes a cleavage between the salaried people, the mowazzafeen and the farmers, the fellaheen. While the former is "absorbed in a concern which, despite its plural appearance, was actually single and indivisible – religion and politics" (*IAAL*, 50), the latter is interested in questions about the soil and the crops. When Ustaz Mustafa, a former law-student at the University of Alexandria, apologizes to the narrator for some fellaheen and peremptorily dismisses them as people uninterested in religion, the narrator promptly identifies with them: "I am just like that myself" (*IAAL*, 51). Having distinguished between the interests of the two classes of people, the narrator associates himself with the lower one. In modern Egypt, the narrator faces a world much different from the medieval world of Ben Yiju and Bomma where cultural, ethnic and religious borders were completely porous.

In his bid to relate to the Egyptian villagers, the narrator engages in discussions with them about their beliefs and customs. To his dismay, he experiences a post-colonial Third World where the spirit of camaraderie is displaced by a celebration of differences. Perplexed about the narrator's "Hindu" religion, a "religious identity" which he had by "default" (*IAAL*, 47), Ustaz Mustafa questions him about "this 'Hinduki' thing? I have heard of it before and I don't understand it" (*IAAL*, 47). His primary objective is to try to convert the narrator into Islam:

> Now that you are here among us you can understand and learn about Islam, and then you can make up your mind whether you want to stay within that religion of yours. [...] You will see then how much better Islam is than this "Hinduki" of yours. (*IAAL*, 48-51)

Far from playing a passive role in his discussions with the ethnographic narrator, Mustafa simply reverses the gaze. Hinduism is perceived as a completely different and strange system of values. Evident here is Mustafa's bold assertion of his own cultural and religious superiority over the narrator's, albeit in an amicable spirit. The self tries to mould the "other" into its own image. When it can't, it makes the "other" aware of its difference and exclusion. In Lataifa during Ramadan, when almost the entire village is on fast, the narrator wants to join as well. But his spirit of empathy is not appreciated by them because "only Muslims fast at Ramadan" (*IAAL*, 75). The narrator understands that Muslims in all parts of the world are practicing the same ritual. They form a special global community from which the narrator is barred because "to belong to that immense community was a privilege which they had to re-earn every year, and the effort made them doubly conscious of the value of its boundaries" (*IAAL*, 76). It dawns on the narrator, like his counterpart in *The Shadow Lines*, that boundaries are etched both on maps as well as in minds.

As a third-world anthropologist the narrator occupies a rather ambiguous position, "neither 'inside' nor 'outside', but occupying a 'between' always open on both sides to contestation" (Scott, 80-1). As an Indian in Egypt he is promptly welcomed as "one of us" (*IAAL*, 46). The long history of intercultural relations between India and Egypt, connections defined without any reference to the West, gets a Himalayan lift in the hands of a village-woman when she welcomes the narrator: "the people of Egypt and India have been like brothers for centuries. You must consider yourself one of our family" (*IAAL*, 186). Introducing the narrator to his peers, Ustaz Sabry enunciates the identical predicaments of the two countries, how both have been "ransacked by imperialists" (*IAAL*, 134), and are trying to cope with poverty, agricultural deficiencies and other problems "bequeathed to them by their troubled histories" (*IAAL*, 134). At times the narrator's foreignness gives him an extra privilege as when Khamees explains to him that the normally condescending Imam would comply with him because "he knows you're a foreigner. He'll listen to you" (*IAAL*, 233). At other times the narrator's foreignness also leads him to trouble. While his rusty Arabic and "halting explanations" (*IAAL*, 112) rouses the suspicions of the taxi driver en route to Nashawy, his interest in a Jewish saint gets him involved in interrogations by a local police officer.

The narrator's deviation from the Eurocentric rational, realist ethnographic discourse lies in his empathic identification with and compassion for the local peasants. He is sometimes the scholar from India and at other times the butt of Jabir's jokes who "doesn't know a thing, [...] not religion, not politics, not sex, just like a child" (*IAAL*, 63). When the narrator congratulates Khamees on a child he mistakenly identifies to be the latter's son, the astonished Khamees exclaims: "The Indian knows, [...] he understands that people are happy when they have children: he's not as upside down as we thought" (*IAAL*, 172). Khamees's rhetoric reminds the reader of Thamma in *The Shadow Lines* and her remark about her ancestral house in Dhanmundi: "Nothing's upside down" (*TSL*, 212). A shared cultural practice turns the self-other dialectic on its head. Nabeel's attempt to enter the mind of the narrator and to see and feel things as he did touches the narrator deeply because "it was the first time that anyone in Lataifa or Nashawy had attempted an enterprise similar to mine — to enter my imagination and look at my situation as it might appear to me" (*IAAL*, 152). This insightful ability to look at the world from the other's perspective is the narrator's ethnographic enterprise. This perfectly accords with Malinowski's credo that the ethnographer should try to "grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* life" (25).

The narrator presents a wealth of detail about the socio-cultural life of the Egyptian villagers, albeit unobtrusively. The over-enthusiastic Jabir, out of sheer exhibitionism, relates to the narrator the incident of a murder, veritably an accident, and concludes that there is going to be a blood feud. Jabir's narrative posture — "drawing himself up to his full height" (*IAAL*, 69) — conveys his pride in the ancient Arab custom. The narrator explains the sequence of events that lead up to the blood feud — the dead man's family had the licence to kill the murderer's male kin on the paternal side as revenge. Then the two lineages would negotiate a blood-money payment in their elders' presence: "That was thâr, the law of feud; damn, the law of blood; the ancient, immutable law of the Arabs" (*IAAL*, 69). But what was once a sacred custom of the Arabs is now a trivialized ritual, shorn off its medieval splendour. Since the killer belonged to "a big and powerful family", the envisaged feud did not transpire and the "token payment' appeased the wronged family: "Feuds and vengeance killings were things of the past; nowadays it was the government's job to deal with crimes and murders"

(*IAAL*, 136). Amitav Ghosh presents a similar episode in his D.Phil thesis. The relevant section may be quoted for clarity's sake:

> On that instance the men of the killer's lineage did not leave the area, for his lineage was the "dominant lineage" (asl al balad) of the village and very powerful, while the dead man's relatives were poor and few. They presented no real threat to the killer's lineage who saw no reason to leave the area. (*Kinship*, 178)

The criminal's power and wealth help him to avoid both the feud and the legal prosecutions. This explicates the discontinuity between the much haloed feud of the past and its present distortion. The solidarity of the wronged, self-respecting lineage is based on the self's immersion in the spirit of the community which is well enunciated by Scheler:

> the vengeful impulses of a member of the family or tribal unit in respect of any insult or injury towards a fellow-member of the same unit, is not due to fellow-feeling [...], but to an immediate awareness of this insult or injury as affecting himself; a phenomenon which is directly based upon the fact that the individual begins by living in the community to a much greater extent than he does in himself. (248)

Interestingly, it is the spirit of communal solidarity during medieval times that forced Ben Yiju to leave his native country because the "implicit suggestion" of the medieval document is that he "may have fled to India in order to escape a blood feud" (*IAAL*, 162). This accentuates the gulf between the past and the present.

The narrator discerns that differences in power and wealth, class and sex permeate every aspect of life in the Egyptian villages. The two founding families of Nashawy, the Badawy and the Abu-Kanaka lineages, assumed the roles of the landowners and the Imams respectively. The lineage of the Jammal, comprising the labourers and sharecroppers, formed the poorest class, below the dominating duo. Despite the "deliverance from forced labour" (*IAAL*, 195) and the financial gains that the Revolution of 1952 ensured for the Jammal, they "still fell outside the boundaries of respectability" (*IAAL*, 164). Young men who have not experienced the past equate history with myth. The sporadic clashes between the Jammal and the Badawy parallel the Hindu-Muslim riots in India. The fact that class and wealth determine the outlook of a community is evident from Zaghloul's word of caution for the romantic Eid:

> "love" is not for people like us. [...] For us it only leads to trouble. [...] Love is for students and mowazzafeen and city

> people; they think about it all the time, just like they think of football. For us it's different; it's better not to think of it. (*IAAL*, 217)

The naïve Eid's conception of love is moulded by the presentation of urban life on television: "they all fall in love — in Cairo and Alexandria and Damanhour. You can see it on TV" (*IAAL*, 219). Television has created a cuckoo-land for Eid culminating in the loss of distinction between the real and the imagined, reality and illusion, surface and depth. The result is a culture of "hyperreality", in which distinctions between these are eroded. This marks the second stage in Baudrillard's four-fold strategy of simulacrum, masking and perverting a basic reality thereby inaugurating "an age of simulacra and simulation, in which there is no longer any God to recognize his own, nor any last judgement to separate truth from false, the real from its artificial resurrection, since everything is already dead and risen in advance" (153). It is Zaghloul who tries to illuminate Eid about the commodification of women's bodies in big cities. The narrator presents the plight of a separated woman through Khamees's sister, Busaina, who has left her husband and come back to her parents' house with her child. Resolute and independent, she gradually progresses from a vendor of vegetables to a "seasoned businesswoman"(*IAAL*, 225). Busaina sets store by education and her two sons perform exceptionally well at school. Unfortunately, the narrator does not present Busaina's life in detail which makes Claire Chambers observe that "the female sex is an Other whose story is not greatly illuminated here" ("Anthropology as Cultural Translation", 14).

Each vignette that the narrator sketches in the novel has its peculiarities which mark it off from the others. Amm Taha, for instance, is an unconventional trader who sells vegetables and milk products. But the prime reason for his success is his knowledge of women's secrets. He almost assumes a legendary status in rural folklore as a person who "keeps an eye on everything [...] because one of his eyes looks to the left, while the other watches the right" (*IAAL*, 128). The portrait of Amm Taha brings to mind the equally unconventional, dyspeptic Nury in *The Circle of Reason* who is painfully cross-eyed, one of his eyes half-shut as well. Zaghloul, the weaver, is a master story-teller who could weave stories in his yarn: "he had a manner of telling them that was marvellously faithful to the metaphorical resonances of his chosen craft" (*IAAL*, 137). Zaghloul's

stories resemble the narrative power of Zindi in *The Circle of Reason* which organizes the experiences of the individuals and the community and restores continuity and identity. The narrator extols the power of narrative creating a meaningful and coherent order on life. He himself experiences the reconstructive power of narrative in his conversations with Shaikh Musa: "Thinking back later, it often seemed to me that we had created a village of our own during those conversations, between the two of us" (*IAAL*, 117).

The description of the dancer at a wedding ceremony in Nashawy is a word for word repetition of the presentation of Zaghloul's dance in al-Ghazira in Ghosh's first novel. Zaghloul's dance is described thus: "*Khadnáhá min wasat ad-dar*, he chanted; we took her from her father's house. *Wa abúha gá'id záalán*, the crowd shouted back; while her father sat there bereft. Then Zaghloul again — *Khadnáhá bis-saif il-mádi*; we took her with our sharpest sword. And the refrain, *Wa abúha makánsh rádi*; because her father wouldn't consent" (*The Circle of Reason*, 336). The interesting parallel in *In An Antique Land* can be quoted for the sake of comparison: "somebody called out the first line of a chant, *Khadnáhá min wasat ad-dâr*, 'we took her from her father's house', and the crowd shouted back, *Wa abûha gâ'id záalân*, 'while her father sat there bereft'. Then the single voice again, *Khadnâha bi al-saif al-mâdi*, 'we took her with a sharpened sword', followed by the massed refrain, *Wa abûha makânsh râdi*, 'because her father wouldn't consent'" (*IAAL*, 201-202). The novelist attributes this overlap to his habit of keeping extensive diaries while doing fieldwork in Egypt. He acknowledges the influence of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* which made him realize the vital importance of conversations to narrative of any kind: "After Boswell I began to write down every conversation in meticulous detail, so these scenes, the dancing scenes and so on, came straight out of my diaries; in *The Circle of Reason* as well" (Chambers, "The Absolute Essentialness of Conversations", 28).

In Ghosh's first novel, *The Circle of Reason*, the multitudes of characters in al-Ghazira are individualized through their stories. In *In An Antique Land*, the Egyptian fellaheen are given distinctive identities through their interrogations which put the narrator in an awkward position. They are characterized not by their temperament but by their ideas and the way they are expressed. Ghosh draws on Bakhtin's notions of polyphony and constructs the villagers as "free people who are capable of standing beside their creator, of disagreeing with him, and even of

rebelling against him" (37). Multiple registers as they are, they even create a collision of wills with the narrator. The narrator's authority as an ethnographer and gatherer of information is undermined in a sort of counter-ethnography. He is as much a subject position as an object of study to the Egyptians. Ustaz Mustafa's proud assertion that "I have read all about India" (*IAAL*, 46) proves that the ethnographer's culture has been both studied and interpreted. When the teenaged Jabir questions the narrator about the Indians' attitude towards circumcision, he reflects on the problems of translating from one language to another:

> In Arabic the word 'circumcise' derives from a root that means 'to purify': to say of someone that they are 'uncircumcised' is more or less to call them impure.
>
> 'Yes', I answered, 'yes, many people in my country are 'impure'. I had no alternative; I was trapped by language.

Confronted with the barriers of language, the narrator cannot express himself properly because in Arabic even the innocuous word "uncircumcised" becomes overwrought with connotations of irreligiousness. Failing to answer Jabir's questions, the narrator, in a complete reversal, becomes an object of fun and "remained a child in Jabir's eyes" (*IAAL*, 65). The narrator faces this linguistic obstacle again when he fails to provide a satisfactory answer to Khamees' question about Indians "burning" their dead bodies: "since I had not succeeded in finding a word such as 'cremate' in Arabic, I knew I would have to give my assent to the term that Khamees had used" (*IAAL*, 168). The narrator's failure in translation provokes Khamees' ingenious interpretation of the former's culture: "They do it so their bodies can't be punished upon the Day of Judgement" (*IAAL*, 169). Busaina, a village woman, urges the narrator to refrain from these customs and extols "our ways and how we do these things" (*IAAL*, 169). Her presumed clincher that "[e]verything's upside down in that country" (*IAAL*,) demonstrates how the self, in an act of homogenization, projects the other as its mirror image. The observer-observed relationship is thus replaced by a cross-cultural dialogue with the narrator and the interlocutors on an equal footing. Nabeel rams home this point to the narrator when invited as an honoured guest in a wedding ceremony, he becomes an easy target to a series of questions related to Indian culture:

> They were only asking questions [...] just like you do; they didn't mean any harm. Why do you let this talk of cows and burning and circumcision worry you so much? These are just customs; it's natural that people should be curious. These are not things to be upset about. (*IAAL*, 204)

The narrator's uneasiness to the fellaheen's repeated questions about the Indians' cultural practices results from a traumatizing communal experience in the subcontinent. His childhood experience of the 1964 communal riots in Dhaka moulds and determines his sensitivity to the Hindu-Muslim relations. Under the pull of his discomfiting experiences amongst the fellahen, the horrible memories of his past soar out of their respective temporal grooves and become contemporaneous with the present. Hence his memories still "possess a life" (*IAAL*, 205) and are "very vivid" (*IAAL*, 208). As he recollects those harrowing experiences he "can see the enraged mob and the dancing flames with a vivid, burning clarity, yet all of it happens in utter silence; my memory, in act of benign protection, has excised every single sound" (*IAAL*, 208). Like his counterpart in *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator's memory is an archaeology of silences. The riot, the memory of which is indelibly engraved in his mind, is the same one which kills Tridib in *The Shadow Lines* and is described in a similar manner in the two novels. Communal discord is defeated by cultural solidarity as the riot's madness, "a pathological inversion", reminds one "of that indivisible sanity binds people to each other independently of their governments" (*TSL*, 230): "it is the incantation that redeems our sanity — in both Dhaka and Calcutta, there were exactly mirrored stories of Hindus and Muslims coming to each others' rescue, so that many more people were saved than killed" (*IAAL*, 209-210). For the narrator, questions about circumcision or worship of cows are always tinged with the heavy memory of communal tension. The Nashawy fellaheen would never be able to comprehend their implications for the narrator because "theirs was a world that was far gentler, far less violent, very much more humane and innocent than mine" (*IAAL*, 210).The trauma of communal frenzy forbids him to accompany Ustaz Mustafa to the mosque. The medieval world of religious and cultural syncretism is dislodged by a world fraught with disharmony as the narrator underlines this cultural difference amongst the Orientals:

> The stories of those riots are always the same: tales that grow out of an explosive barrier of symbols — of cities going up in flames because of a cow found dead in a temple or a pig in a mosque; of people killed for wearing a lungi or a dhoti, depending on where they find themselves; of women disembowelled for wearing veils or vermilion, of men dismembered for the state of their foreskins. (*IAAL*, 210)

The ethnographer thus reveals as much about his own self as the objects of his research.

The narrator witnesses in rural Egypt the effects of globalization fostering rapid social and economic changes. The creation of a hybridized culture notwithstanding, the fellaheen have embraced a crass consumerism. The result is a competition for one-upmanship conducted according to the hegemony of Western modernity. The point is established very early in the novel when the narrator observes that it was a matter of great pride for Abu-'Ali that he "possessed more — more gadgets, especially — than anyone else in Lataifa" (*IAAL*, 26). The account of the acquisition of a brand-new Indian diesel water-pump by Mabrouk's father is another case in point. A proud possessor of this rare machine, Mabrouk's father invites the narrator to comment on it. The narrator is put on trial by the encircling villagers who eagerly await "the outcome of my silent communion with this product of my native soil" (*IAAL*, 73). When he comments positively on the machine "a joyful hubbub broke out in the courtyard"(*IAAL*, 73). The "makana Hindi" (*IAAL*, 73) is a means of moving forward along the lines of modernity for the peasant and a counter-opportunity to impress. The subaltern peasant, by "converting differences into sets of preferences" (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 48), draws level with the modern world by attaining a capitalist lifestyle. It piques the narrator, however, that what redeems him in the eyes of some fellaheen is his expertise on an imported Indian machine;

> I stayed up a long time that night, marvelling at the respect the water-pump had earned me; I tried to imagine where I would have stood in Jabir's eyes if mine had been a country that exported machines that were even bigger, a better and more impressive — cars and tractors perhaps, not to speak of ships and planes and tanks. (*IAAL*,74)

Firm in their conviction that the narrator is a representative of the elite, "modern", "outside" world, the Egyptian fellaheen constantly bamboozle him about the state of technology and agriculture back home in India, whether Indians "cook on gas stoves or [...] still burn straw and wood" (*IAAL*, 200) as they themselves do. The narrator is astonished that his answer that the Indians still use cattle-drawn ploughs and donkey-carts and not advanced technology and that there are millions still languishing in unimaginable poverty fails to assure his Egyptian interlocutors. Reflecting on his experiences the narrator concludes that the Egyptians had

conceived a fixed notion of the situation in the world outside which was completely different from the reality that the narrator presented to them: "they had constructed a certain ladder of 'Development' in their minds, and because all their images of material life were of those who stood in the rungs above, the circumstances of those below had become more or less unimaginable" (*IAAL*, 200). The narrator then expatiates upon the relation between tradition and modernity which is at the heart of the matter;

> I had an inkling then of the real and desperate seriousness of their engagement with modernism, because I realized that the fellaheen saw the material circumstances of their lives in exactly the same way that a university economist would: as a situation that was shamefully anachronistic, a warp upon time; I understood that their relationships with the objects of their everyday lives was never innocent of the knowledge that there were other places, other countries which did not have mud-walled houses and cattle-drawn ploughs, so that those objects, those houses and ploughs, were insubstantial things, ghosts displaced in time, waiting to be exorcized and laid to rest. (*IAAL*, 200-201)

Modernity, as the narrator conceptualizes it, is not a fissure or a radical break with the past but a sense of accommodation — of the new incorporating the old, the past existing within the present. Modernity is an evolving process, bringing together diverse strands of experience: "It was thus that I had my first suspicion of what it might mean to belong to an 'historical civilization', and it left me bewildered because, for my own part, it was precisely the absoluteness of time and the discreteness of epochs that I always had trouble in imagining" (*IAAL*, 201). The narrator's belief in flowing time and continuous history aligns him with T.S. Eliot who pontificates that "[i]n an ideal state of society, one might imagine the good New growing naturally out of the good Old, without the need for polemic and theory, this would be a society with a living tradition" (184). The narrator's modernity is thus one of synthesis and reconciliation.

Colonialism wins its great victories not only because of its military and technological prowess but also because of its cultural appropriation. It creates secular hierarchies incompatible with the traditional order. By passing colonialism off as a civilizing mission, the colonizers dupe the colonized. Carrying a certain cultural baggage, the colonial system perpetuates itself by inducing the colonized to accept new social norms and cognitive categories. Unnoticed and hence unchallenged, these are instruments of oppression and dominance. Under the

cloak of a civilizing mission, the colonial system persuades the colonized to internalize its logic and absorb its values. By responding to the fresh opportunities provided by the colonizer, the colonized actively participates in his own oppression, thereby, corroding his own self. The colonized is thus a participant in a "moral and cognitive venture against oppression" (Nandy, xiv). By making choices, he becomes a self-destructive co-victim. This is "the intimate enemy" position — that which moulds one's interiority also corrodes him from within, resulting in the loss of his self. "This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all"(Nandy, xi). The inevitable result is the thorough Westernization and modernization of the colonized. Complete surrender to the technological superiority of Western modernity and wholesale rejection of local cultures piques the anthropologist narrator. The Imam, one of the last repositories of traditional medical lore, is now convinced that his own healing powers are worthless in the face of modern Western knowledge. Such is the unquestioning acceptance of his own inferiority that his indigenous medicines are "even more discredited in his own eyes than they were in everyone else's" (*IAAL*, 193). He bitterly regrets his inherited association with the relics of the past. He is now learning "the art of mixing and giving injections" (*IAAL*, 192). A cool, calculating individual, the Imam is fully aware of the material benefits of his new practice: "There was a good living in it; it was where the future lay" (*IAAL*, 192). The self-abnegated Imam locates the West's superiority in its destructive power: "They're not an ignorant people. They're advanced, they're educated, they have science, they have guns and tanks and bombs" (*IAAL*, 235). The provoked narrator retorts: "we have guns and tanks and bombs [...]. We've even had a nuclear explosion. You won't be able to match that even in a hundred years" (*IAAL*, 235-236). Recognizing the irony of the situation, he sees himself and the Imam as "delegates from two superseded civilizations, vying with each other to establish a prior claim to the technology of modern violence" (*IAAL*, 236). The two between them show in action the ubiquity of the Eurocentrism of the colonized. Such is the universality of the language of power that even for "an old-fashioned village Imam" (*IAAL*, 237) and the narrator, "a student of the 'humane' sciences" (*IAAL*, 237), "demonstrated the irreversible triumph of the language that has usurped all the others in which people once discussed their differences" (*IAAL*, 236). Ethics

and divine sanction for it are extinct. While "non-Western" and sometimes "anti-Western" views "involve an emphatic seeking of independence from colonial dominance", explains Amartya Sen, "they are, in fact, thoroughly foreign-dependent — in a negative and contrary form. The dialectics of the captivated mind can lead to a deeply biased and parasitically reactive self-perception"(91). Thus the colonial masters of yesterday, continues Sen, continue to exert an enormous influence on the postcolonial mind today leading to the "dissolution of the centuries of dialogue" (*IAAL*, 236) that had linked two Oriental civilizations.

The narrator discovers in Nashawy a palimpsest of migration and inter-cultural crossing since medieval times:

> The area around Nashawy had never been a rooted kind of place; at times it seemed to be possessed of all the busy restlessness of an airport's transit lounge. Indeed, a long history of travel was recorded in the very names of the area's 'families': they spoke of links with distant parts of the Arab world — cities in the Levant, the Sudan and the Maghreb. That legacy of transience had not ended with their ancestors either: in Zaghloul's own generation dozens of men had been 'outside', working in the sheikhdoms of the Gulf, or Libya, while many others had been to Saudi Arabia on the Hajj, or to the Yemen, as soldiers — some men had passports so thick they opened out like ink-blackened concertinas. (*IAAL*, 174)

The conflation of the village of Nashawy with an airline transit lounge, believes James Clifford, is an ideal image of postmodernity: "Everyone is on the move, and they have been for centuries: dwelling-in-travel"("The Transit Lounge of Culture", 8). What the passage highlights is that border-crossings and cosmopolitanism are not simply postmodern phenomena. Even during the twelfth century, a small town named Qus was, in Ben Yiju's estimation, "admirably cosmopolitan" (*IAAL*, 174). The pressure of cosmopolitan business negotiations compelled the Indian and the Arab traders in medieval Malabar to forge a pidgin language that they could all understand. Amitav Ghosh himself observes in his essay "The Slave of MS H.6" that globality was first experienced in the periphery and refuses "to ascribe to European intervention a phenomenon that almost certainly preceded it. Considering the volume and extent of trade in the Indian Ocean, it would seem likely that a trade language was already in use there since long before the arrival of the Portuguese" (*II*, 226).The difference between medieval cosmopolitanism and its postmodern legacy lies in volume, a point explicitly stated by Said: "the difference between earlier exiles and those of our

own times is, it bears stressing, scale: our age — with its modern warfare, imperialism and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers — is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration" ("Reflections on Exile", 357). The narrator experiences this large rate of mass migration and the fruits of global capitalism in rural Egypt. The war between Iraq and Iran in the late 1970s and early 1980s initiated this large rate of mass immigration from Egypt dissolving the two nations: "People had left in truckloads: it was said at one time that there were maybe two or three million Egyptian workers in Iraq, as much as a sixth of that country's population" (*IAAL*, 293). Abu Ali, presented as a capitalist machine, "the image of an engorged python" (*IAAL*, 297), utilizes the opportunity of the economic prospects in Iraq during the Gulf War to the fullest. While the father is a capitalist, the sons are the abstract labour. Such are "his gleanings from that distinct war" (*IAAL*, 299) that when the narrator moves from the ground floor to the newly constructed top floor of Abu Ali's residence, he "was assaulted by a sudden sensation of dislocation, as though I had vaulted between different epochs" (*IAAL*, 298). The winds of change have blown over the entire village of Nashawy rearranging the relations between different kinds of people. Families, once considered the poorest in the village, have prospered the most inverting the power dynamics in the village. Shaikh Musa once explained the phenomenon of leaving to the narrator: "'Why does anyone leave? [...] The opportunity comes and it has to be taken'"(*IAAL*,298). The past-present parallel in respect of migration is established by the narrator in his observation that Ben Yiju journeyed eastwards to avail himself of "the most rewarding possibilities his world had to offer" (*IAAL*, 153). As a person who could not migrate to war-time Iraq and make a fortune, the once energetic Jabir now hopelessly laments: "'I missed the best opportunities'" (*IAAL*, 311). Such is the irony of life that while the Iraqis are dying on the war-front, the Egyptians are amassing a great profit at the expense of their blood. As Ustaz Sabry philosophically comments that this wealth is "tainted, 'forbidden' money, and its price will be paid later, some day" (*IAAL*, 321).

Nabeel and Ismail are a study in contrast. While the former was quiet, thoughtful and reflective, the latter was spontaneous and jocular. Even in physical features, they sharply differed from each other. The narrator discerns in them a "kind of complementarity" and "a close-stitched seam of differences" (*IAAL*, 148). Nabeel and Ismail have migrated to Iraq, leaving behind their lineage, Ali

and Hussein who "like Nabeel and Ismail before them, were best friends, and were studying at the same college as their brothers had" (*IAAL*, 324). Walking with them, the narrator experiences a sense of timelessness as the past merges with the present:

> It was eerie crossing the village with the two of them beside me. It was as though a moment in time had somehow escaped the hurricane of change that had swept Nabeel and Ismail away to Iraq: the two cousins so much resembled their brothers that I could have been walking with ghosts. (*IAAL*, 324)

It is Ismail who returns home from Iraq narrating incidents about the animosity between the Iraqis and the Egyptians. In a world much different from medieval cultural assimilation, the Iraqis nurture a grudge against the Egyptians because they "have taken our jobs and our money and grown rich while we're fighting and dying" (*IAAL*, 352). The Egyptians' celebration of the victory of their national football team over Algeria is viewed by the Iraqis as a deviation from normal life and "they responded by attacking them on the streets, often with firearms — well-trained in war, they fell upon the jubilant, unarmed crowds of Egyptian workers" (*IAAL*, 353). In this seething cauldron when the Egyptian immigrants set sail for their homeland, Nabeel decides to stay on a bit longer, so that the modernization of his house in Nashawy could be completed, a decision which proves quite costly. Reflecting on Nabeel's predicament in his essay "An Egyptian in Baghdad" which formed "the basis of the epilogue of *In An Antique Land*", Amitav Ghosh sighs that "many of my friends had been trapped on the shores of the Red Sea" (*II*, viii). At the end of the essay, he observes that "we were crowded around the television set, watching carefully, minutely, looking at every face we could see. But there was nothing to be seen except crowds: Nabeel had vanished into the pages of the epic exodus" (*II*, 45). The novel concludes on a slightly different note: "Nabeel had vanished into the anonymity of History" (*IAAL*, 353). The emphasis on "History" signifies the narrator's concern about how the broad sweep of historical incidents engulfs the lives of ordinary individuals, the anonymous subalterns, who are untraceable. This is a neat encapsulation of the paradox of History — it not only records into permanence but also dissolves into anonymity.

When the medieval temper of cultural assimilation is replaced by cultural segregation, the narrator perceives the continuity between the past and the present

still unabated in the sphere of religion and legends. The legend about the miracle surrounding the Bhuta shrine in Mangalore reminds the narrator about "a very similar story" (*IAAL*, 266) about the shrine of Sidi Abu-Kanaka in Nashawy. The mowlid or event of Sidi Abu-Hasira is also a mark of religious syncretism because he was venerated by both Jews and Muslims. When interrogated by a police officer about his visit to the tomb of Sidi Abu-Hasira on the outskirts of Damanhour the narrator is suddenly confronted with the evanescence of a great event in human civilization:

> But then it struck me, suddenly, that there was nothing I could point to within his world that might give credence to my story — the remains of those small indistinguishable, intertwined histories, Indian and Egyptian, Muslim and Jewish, Hindu and Muslim, had been partitioned long ago. Nothing remained in Egypt now to effectively challenge his disbelief: not a single one, for instance, of the documents of the Geniza. It was then that I began to realize how much success the partitioning of the past had achieved; [...] I had been caught straddling a border, unaware that the writing of History had predicated its own self-fulfilment. (*IAAL*, 339-340)

The bewildered narrator is ruthlessly reminded about the separatist stance of Western academic methodology and modern ethos. The police officer who interrogates the narrator and emphasizes the difference between religion and superstition champions the epistemological apparatus of Western modernity: "I discovered that his understanding of the map of modern knowledge was much more thorough than mine" (*IAAL*, 341-342). The site of interrogation itself signifies that although power has been transferred from the colonial West to the post-colonial bourgeois, the legacy of Western modernity still continues undiminished: "the building seemed very much in the style of colonial offices in India with high ceilings and arched windows: it took no great prescience to tell that it had probably been initiated into its current uses during the British occupation of Egypt" (*IAAL*, 338). When the narrator researches in American libraries on Sidi Abu-Hasira and looks for information about him under categories like "religion" and "Judaism", he discovers how information about this syncretic medieval culture "had long been wished away" by the material realities of "the process of shaping them to suit the patterns of the Western academy" (*IAAL*, 342). Sidi Abu-Hasira finds a place on the shelves of "anthropology" and "folklore"and not mainstream "religion". He learns that Sidi Abu-Hasira belongs to a famous "Zeddikim — the Jewish counterparts of Islamic marabouts and Sufi saints"

(*IAAL*, 342), respected equally by Jews and Muslims. Uncannily, the narrator "had never known all those years that in defiance of the enforcers of History, a small remnant of Bomma's world had survived, not far from where I had been living" (*IAAL*, 342). Pressing forward with his research in Philadelphia, the indefatigable researcher comes across a medieval document, in Ben Yiju's distinctive handwriting, amidst a store of Geniza documents. This document proves that Bomma accompanied Ben Yiju to Egypt in the last years of his life. The anonymity of History had claimed Bomma just as it claims Nabeel. The humanist anthropologist retrieves "the last testament to the life of Bomma, the toddy-loving fisherman from Tulunad" (*IAAL*, 349) and captures the full-lived truth about the Slave, underlining the limitations of a scientifically pure social anthropology. The reader nourishes the idea that just as the narrator could trace the alternative history of Bomma, Nabeel's too can be retrived from anonymity.

Chapter Five

Subverting the 'Metaphysic' of Rationality

The Calcutta Chromosome

One thing, they say, is obtained from real knowledge; another, they say, from what is not knowledge. [...] He who knows at the same time both knowledge and not-knowledge, overcomes death through not-knowledge, and obtains immortality through knowledge. — K.M. Sen, *Hinduism*

[I]t is hard to see how, even at a superficial level, Western science could have functioned in many parts of the world without being able to draw upon "local" knowledge and "native" agency of various kinds [...] many of the scientific discoveries formerly claimed for the West have been traced back to earlier sources of indigenous knowledge". — David Arnold, *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India*

Amitav Ghosh's fourth novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award for the best science fiction in 1997, is a tour de force. The novel is a landmark both in the history of Indian fiction in English and in his rich oeuvre. It is a marked departure from Ghosh's earlier novels based on personal memories and anthropological research experiences. Critical reception of the novel ranges from total dismissal to near rapturous appraisal. Such is the extent of Indira Bhatt's discontent that she is compelled to ask "[i]s it anything more than 'cacoethes scribendi' disappointing and disillusioning the readers' expectation from Amitav Ghosh?" (195). Likewise for Ramesh Kumar Gupta, "the novel presents the feverish fallacy which does not form any impression on the reader's mind as it occurs in the case of thrillers"(226). In stark contrast to this demolition process, Tarun J. Tejpal is greatly impressed by the novel's "breath-taking intensity and variety" representing "history, science, Egypt, Bengal, the fluid interflow between rural and urban, between cultures and civilizations, the play of ideas" (76). This neatly polarized opinion on the same novel signifies the continuing vitality of *The Calcutta Chromosome*.

Despite Ghosh's reiteration that the novel as an art form is so inclusive that it is difficult to be categorized, critics have often read *The Calcutta*

Chromosome by straitjacketing it within a particular literary theory. Madhumalati Adhikari for one calls *The Calcutta Chromosome* a "post-colonial novel" ("*The Calcutta Chromosome*: A Post-Colonial Novel", 177) and explores the "post-colonial characteristics to be found" (178) in it. In a similar vein, Isabella Bruschi contends that the novel "could be appropriately defined as a postcolonial allegory" (65). Categorizing *The Calcutta Chromosome* as "a postmodern narrative" (163), Pramod Nayar reads the novel as a "rhizome where there are only (uncertain) 'elsewheres' and 'outworks', tendentious offshoots, aparallel synapses that rupture, subvert or reject genealogies, linearities and binarisms" (163). Likewise, Subhash Chandra "witnesses some major postmodern tenets at work" (265) in the novel. Such pigeonholing of the novel within the domain of a particular theoretical perspective reduces its scope.

Like any other novel by Amitav Ghosh, the form of *The Calcutta Chromosome* too sharply divides its critics. While Urbash Barat asserts that Ghosh "turns to the thriller for the first time in *The Calcutta Chromosome*" (219), R.K. Dhawan affirms that the novel "is no mere thriller for a fuller reading reveals that it is the work of a social anthropologist than that of a detective novelist" (27). A.G. Khan goes one better; he dubs the novel as "a thriller leading to a fiasco [...] written in a spirit of delirium and uncontrolled frenzy" (184). Not satisfied with this demolition, he takes the novelist down a peg or two on the grounds that "Amitav shows no desire of 'self-improvement' as he time and again pours the same wine in new bottles"(184). A counterblast to it is Madhumalati Adhikari's forthright observation that "it would be too facile to contemplate that Amitav Ghosh in *The Calcutta Chromosome* has attempted to inscribe a simple scientific thriller on the fever, delirium and discovery of the malarial parasite"("The Continuity of Life, Mission and Mystery in *The Calcuta Chromosome*", 228). For her, the novelist has "contrived to introduce a maze of ideas criss-crossing each other to project the profound meaning and mystery of life through a visibly insignificant façade of a 'spine-chiller' that negates the rational view of science and the universe"(228). Controversy grips the novel's theme as well. If "in the earlier novels", observes John C. Hawley, the "hegemonic determinant of identity was nationalism; in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, [...] it is caste" (160). On the contrary, Paul Kincaid discerns two thematic strands in the novel; "the role of the colonist who exploits but is largely ignorant of local culture and knowledge" and

"the very different attitudes to knowledge and research in East and West" (cited in Hawley, 157). These polarized opinions on the same novel reflect on its complexity.

A generic amalgam, *The Calcutta Chromosome* presents a dialectic between Western scientific epistemology and an alternative eastern counter-science bordering on mysticism. The narrative revolves around the Nobel Prize winning Surgeon-Major Ronald Ross's discovery of the malaria parasite in Calcutta in 1898 and subverts it. Ross's Eurocentric heroic self-projections in his *Memoirs* are dismantled by Oriental marginalized mystics whose modus operandi is silence. Murugan, the principal investigator in quest of this counter-scientific cult, inverts the authority of the colonial situation. Writing back against the empire, Murugan claims that Ross was unwittingly a mere instrument at the hands of a secretive, subaltern agency. The *Memoirs* of Ronald Ross not only acts as a *leitmotif* like *The Life of Pasteur* in *The Circle of Reason* but also acts as an intertext which Murugan reads against the grain. The epigraph with which the novel begins strikes the keynote to it. It establishes the theme of quest which is central to the narrative — Ross's quest for the "cunning seeds" of "million-murdering Death" (*The Calcutta Chromosome*, 2), Murugan's for the unknown, inscrutable power that was driving Ross, and Antar's for Murugan's lost traces. Murugan also subverts Ross's poem with his hypothesis that it was not Ross's "relenting God" (*CC*, 2) but an occult force of counter-science which confronts both Western empiricism and Christian theology that propelled Ross on to his discovery. Continuing the legacy of the anthropologist narrator in *In An Antique Land* who pursues the traces of an elusive twelfth century slave, Murugan tries to retrieve an alternative, subaltern voice and an enigmatic epistemological system.

This intricate narrative begins in twenty-first century New York with diasporic functionaries of reputed global organizations and computer surveillances. The cosmopolitan nature of the Ghosh protagonists evident in the earlier novels reappears with Antar, a programmer and systems analyst at the International Water Council (formerly Life Watch). Now on the threshold of retirement in New York, Antar was born in rural Egypt and educated in Cairo and Moscow. The dimension of cosmopolitanism is reinforced by his acquaintances at Penn Station who belong to diverse nationalities: "the Sudanese bank teller, the well-dressed Guyanese woman who worked in a Chelsea used-clothes store, the

young Bangladeshi man from the subway news-stand" (*CC*, 11). His next door neighbours, Tara and Maria, hail from India and Guyana respectively. The global organization for which he works dissolves the geographical boundaries between nations and creates a transnational cartography. Lhasa becomes the organization's command centre for Asia because of its strategical position as the headwaters of several major Hydraulic Regions: "the Ganges-Brahmaputra, the Mekong, the trans-Yangtze, the Hwang-Ho" (*CC*, 10). Moreover, Lhasa controls the International Water Council's information streams in eastern Asia. The centre of authority thus shifts from the Western centre to the non-Western periphery.

While transnational cosmopolitanism dissolves national boundaries, the rather unusual relation between Antar and AVA, his computer, hints at the possible erasure of the demarcation between man and machine. The computer is mentioned by a woman's name, probably echoing the English mathematician Augusta Ada Byron, the brain behind modern computers. Ava speaks Antar's mother tongue, his Arabic dialect, because he programmed her to do so. Antar is amazed by Ava's "eagerness to better herself" (*CC*, 3). When pressed with a tricky question, Ava goes into a "controlled frenzy, firing off questions, one after another" (*CC*, 3). Her demand for information from Antar is immense and when she has extracted the minute details from him she gives "the object on her screen a final spin, with a bizarrely smugness, before propelling it into the horizonless limbo of her memory" (*CC*, 4). Moreover, she has an "eye", a laser-guided surveillance camera that keeps watch on Antar. Antar's response to Ava provides an impetus to this anthropomorphism and strengthens her "human" identity. He behaves with Ava as if she was a child and complies with her wishes. While he is amazed by Ava's "simulated urge for self-improvement" (*CC*, 3), he is also bewildered by "the unbounded darkness of Ava'a heart" (*CC*, 7) and her "trances of unrecognition" (*CC*, 7). Antar's engagement with Ava dissolves the dualism between the man and the machine. Since the information-processing system and its user engage in a cognitive, symbolic process, the distance between the thinker and the thinking instrument diminishes. "The 'world' of experience that information-processing devices open up to us", postulates Barglow, "articulates a mental, rather than a physical terrain" (72). "Within this 'virtual' space", continues Barglow, "the distinctions between 'inside' and 'outside', 'subject' and 'object' tend to collapse, as technologies are developed that render consciousness

with its surroundings" (72). The end result is a human/computer integration strengthening the concept of a unified human/machine or "cyborg".

While the metaphor of weaving binds the world in a complex network in Ghosh's earlier novels, the metaphor of the web assumes a transnational and transcultural dimension in *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Balaram hails the loom as the symbol of globalism in *The Circle of Reason* because "the loom recognizes no continents and no countries. It has tied the world together with its bloody ironies from the beginning of human time" (*CR*, 55). For Shombhu, the creative weaver, weaving defies language and assumes a metaphysical dimension. He insists on the necessity of more than one language to know the parts of the loom and also the inadequacy of language to describe the creative process. While weaving is a metaphor for the power of human creativity and globalism in Ghosh's first novel, the Web and the Internet in *The Calcutta Chromosome* dissolves the dislocations of space and time. It is Antar's powerful tool with which he crosses the spatial boundaries of continents and temporal distinctions in his quest for his fugitive subject, Murugan. The incessant shuttling of time and space and the paradigm of the Web seems to affiliate Ghosh with the postmodern assault on the Enlightenment concepts of knowledge and rationality. Claire Chambers believes, after George Landow, that the poststructuralists led by Foucault and Derrida show a "predilection for imagery such as link (*liaison*), web (*toile*), network (*reseau*) and interwoven (*sy'tissent*)". This seeks to dismiss conceptual frameworks based upon the ideas of "center, margin, hierarchy and linearity" and replace them with models founded on "multilinearity, nodes, lines, and networks" ("Networks of Stories", 44). By establishing a network in which the binaries of the centre and the periphery are disrupted, national and cultural affiliations superseded, and the self and the other dissolved, the novelist affirms the concept of transnationalism.

Amitav Ghosh's metaphors of the Web and weaving not only dismantle the notions of the centre and the periphery but also challenge the Eurocentric grand narrative of History. History and Eurocentrism have always been intimately tied. "'Europe' remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories'", believes Dipesh Chakrabarty, "including the ones we call 'Indian', 'Chinese', 'Kenyan' and so on" (*Provincializing Europe*, 27). The end purpose of Eurocentric historiography has been to justify the claims of European modernity, and providing a rationale for the "first in Europe, then elsewhere" (*Provincializing*

Europe, 7) syndrome. Other national histories are but variations on a grand/master narrative called "the history of Europe". Indian history itself is in a position of subalterneity because "[t]he production of a colonial historiography of India was from the very outset an exercise in dominance, not an act of charity" (Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India*, 3). Eurocentric history stands as the norm against which local/national histories are "deviations" or "lack". This explains the irreducible gap between the European historian and the non-European subaltern. Subaltern historiography is a corrective to elitist historiography and endeavours to recover histories of the people excluded from or suppressed within dominant discourses. These forgotten histories exist as textual traces in the official historical records and the subaltern historian attempts to retrieve the lost historical consciousness invisible hitherto. Subaltern historiography thus not only demolishes the hegemonistic exercise of recorded history and the concomitant power play but also tries to recover the occluded, marginalized voices.

The concept that history is a palimpsest, built like a patina with a "dense layer of accretions" (*IAAL*, 291) which obscures the past is a recurring trope in Ghosh. Like the centuries old Geniza documents in *In An Antique Land*, the imperial archive which is read against the grain in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is the *Memoirs* of Ronald Ross, and the rich body of recorded opinions and conclusions of colonial medical officers and doctors, linguists, administrators and historians who viewed colonial India through the lens of European rationality. The narrative begins, however, not with this colonial archive but with that of the International Water Council. The administrators of the Water Council "saw themselves making History with their vast water-control experiments: they wanted to record every minute detail of what they had done, what they would do. Instead of having an historian sift through their dirt, looking for meanings, they wanted to do it themselves: they wanted to load their dirt with their own meanings" (*TCC*, 6). What is manifest in their project is a desperate attempt to make themselves the conscious subject of their own history. What is evident in their project is a desperate attempt to inscribe themselves as the conscious subjects of their own history. The disruption in the archival process occurs when Ava fails to discern an inscrutable ID card belonging to a person whom Antar identifies as Murugan. Once Life Watch's principal archivist, Murugan suddenly went missing on August, 21, 1995, coincidentally the day after Ronald Ross's "Mosquito Day',

about which Antar is unaware of. For Murugan, migrancy has always been a way of being as he spent his "'global' childhood" "wandering between the world's capitals with his technocrat father" (*CC*, 30). The only fixity in his "peripatetic, internationalized coming-of-age" (*CC*, 30) has been his love of Hollywood 'B' movies and old American TV serials. His travelling, cosmopolitan position is well reflected in the fluidity of his identity — Murugan is known to his Life Watch colleagues as Morgan. Murugan's prime obsession is the medical history of malaria, especially its early phase, and his chief subject is the research career of the Briton, Ronald Ross, a poet, novelist, and scientist. However, his research paper "An Alternative Interpretation of Late 19th Century Malaria Research: is there a Secret History?" meets with a hostile reception and Murugan is dismissed as "a crank and an eccentric" (*CC*, 31). But for this "'cocky little roster of a man'", (*CC*, 29), bubbling with a "combativeness" and an "apparently unstoppable fluency" (*CC*, 30), the "notion of the so-called 'Other Mind'" turned into an idée fixee: "a theory that some person or persons had systematically interfered with Ronald Ross's experiments to push malaria research in certain directions while leading it away from others" (*CC*, 31). Hence he launches into a heroic enterprise to read between the lines of Ross's imperial archive and subverts this institutional site with an alternative/secret history of malaria research erased from scribal records.

It was in the middle of the nineteenth century when the Western scientific community responded to the threats of the dreaded disease malaria. This was the period when "old Mother Europe was settling all the Last Unknowns: Africa, Asia, Australia, the Americas, even uncolonized parts of herself" (*CC*, 47). Western knowledge system coupled with Western imperialism, believes Murugan, to control and dominate the colonies. "The growth of Western knowledge systems and the histories of most disciplines", believes Ania Loomba, "can be embedded within and shaped by colonial discourse" (59). Within this framework, Ronald Ross, fuelled by the Zeitgeist, decides to "'re-write the history books. He wants everyone to know the story like he's going to tell it'" (*CC*, 46). His is the categorical, Western mind accustomed to systematic knowledge formation priortizing written documents. Murugan, however, doubts Ross's credentials. Murugan conceptualizes him as both "a genius" and "a dickhead" (*CC*, 44), a "real huntin', fishin', shootin' Colonial type', "sort of thought he'd like to write

novels; had a go, wrote a couple of medieval romances; then said to himself, hell, this isn't working out like I thought, let's try writing poems instead" (*CC*, 44). The wavering Ross, for whom Medicine is the last thing in his mind, is suddenly transformed into a serious malaria researcher: "one morning he gets out of bed and finds he's been bitten by the science bug" (*CC*, 45). For Murugan, Ross's discovery is complete in a relatively short time compared to the life-long research pursuits of other scientific geniuses and it is just a string of strange coincidences, a "freak one-off thing" (*CC*, 43). Going a step further, Murugan dismisses the heroic individualism of a lone genius braving the odds and asserts that every time when Ross stumbles against a bloc in his research, an unexpected event helps him out, whether it is a blood sample: "Then suddenly his luck changes [...] just when it begins to look really hopeless, he gets his first perfect case of malaria — a patient called Abdul Kadir" (*CC*, 61) or the enigmatic "dhooley-bearer" (*CC*, 63) Lutchman, who is precisely at the right place at the right time to steer Ross. Subverting the claims of dominant Western logocentrism, Murugan advocates that Ross is not the active discoverer but a passive agent in the hands of an unseen, unknown power which is using him for its own needs: "He thinks he's doing experiments on the malaria parasite. And all the time it's he who *is* the experiment on the malaria parasite. But Ronnie never gets it; not to the end of his life" (*CC*, 67).

The anthropocentric world of European Enlightenment put a premium on human reason to solve the crucial problems of life. The Enlightenment project looked up to reason to free mankind from the darkness of superstition, prejudice and slavish obedience to religious precepts and pave the path of progress. This rational and scientific outlook is what Habermas means by "modernity". Contemporary theorists have made a mockery of the Enlightenment's most generous dreams and its naïve faith in the value of scientific and technological progress. Postmodernist thinkers view Enlightenment's rationalism, universalism and foundationalism as dangerously "hegemonic", "logocentric", "totalizing" and "essentialist". They maintain that the enlightenment's universal claims regarding reason and progress have become absurd and oppressive. These Enlightenment claims constitute one of the key "metanarratives" toward which Jean-Francois Lyotard famously expressed his "incredulity" (xxiv). For Lyotard, the Enlightenment's grand theories about the emancipation of humanity through

science and a universal rational consensus are untenable because no homogenizing principle is legitimate. They entail exclusion and coercion and eliminate diversity and difference. Hence, Lyotard equates the Enlightenment idea of rational consensus with terror. He is suspicious of all claims to truth because "[s]cientists, technicians, and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power" (60). What lies beneath an apparent objectivity is the hidden discourse of *realpolitik*: "the exercise of terror" (64). Lyotard validates anti-foundationalism and delegitimation of grand narratives to secure individualism: "We no longer have recourse to grand narratives — we can resort neither to the dialectic of Spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for post-modern scientific discourse [...] the little narrative [*petit récit*] remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention, most particularly in science" (60). Justified is his rejection of positivist Science and a perpetual search for heterogeneity and pluralism.

An important advocate of the concept of the Counter-enlightenment, Isaiah Berlin consistently depicts the Enlightenment ideals as false, naïve, absolutist and dangerous. Berlin dismisses the Enlightenment as "monist' because the Enlightenment thinkers strived to understand the world in terms of a systematic and coherent whole subject to a set of universal and eternal laws knowable by man. What he celebrates is value pluralism. In his essay "The Decline of Utopian Ideas in the West", Berlin enumerates J.G. Herder's contention that there could be no comprehensive, unified "science of man" and that values were not universal:

> every human society, every people, indeed every age and civilization, possesses its own unique ideals, standards, way of living and thought and action. There are no immutable, universal, eternal rules or criteria of judgment in terms of which different cultures and nations can be graded in some single order of excellence. (37)

Any monist attempt to impose a single set of norms on all societies and all individuals is profoundly dangerous. The belief in the possibility of an ultimate solution to all human problems is "responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altars of the great historical ideals" (Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty", 238-239). Hence, Enlightenment monism ultimately resulted in oppression. Murugan's counter-history of malaria research is a deflation of the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

The India that emerges in Murugan's narrative is full of cognitive uncertainties and experiential enigmas inscrutable to the structured mind. The romantic India of 18th century Western imagination is replaced by a land of secret cults and hidden truths. In this mysterious realm all the Western scientists but Ross who plunge into malaria research disappear in one way or the other: Grigson is scared away, Farley vanishes into thin air, Cunningham returns to England. The eerie figure who plays the pivotal role in all these "disappearances", resurfacing intermittently over several generations in various guises is Ross's "dhooley-bearer" Lutchman. It is Lutchman, believes Murugan, who suggests to Ross that the anopheles mosquito is vitally important to the transmission of malaria: "Lutchman's got him chasing after the real malaria vector" (*CC*, 66). Ross, however, is never interested in the identity of Lutchman. It is Grigson, a linguist and an anatomist, who tries to unveil Lutchman's enigmatic identity. Lutchman's delayed response when called by that name makes Grigson believe that his name is not really Lutchman, "he's changed it to make it look like he's from the area" (*CC*, 76). The expert linguist analyzes that what is "'Lutchman' in one place is Laakhan somewhere else and Lokhkhon in another place, and Lakshman in still another: depending on which part of the country you're from" (*CC*, 76-77). The anatomist in Grigson discovers Lutchman's distinguishing physical trait: his left hand has four fingers but no thumb. As the inquisitive Grigson probes deeper into Lutchman's identity, he is scared by the subaltern figure when he lures the Englishman in front of an onrushing locomotive. Before leaving Secunderabad for good, Grigson transcribes his experience into his diary which serves as a rich historical document.

Murugan's chronicle of the late-Victorian Western scientists who researched on malaria and were completely unaware of the occult traditions also includes D.D. Cunningham and the American Reverend Elijah Monroe Farley. Cunningham's research in a Calcutta based laboratory is assisted by a "'chhokray-boy'" (*CC*, 119) and a "'dragon'" like "'sweeper-woman'". She has "'been here forever'" and "loves to look at people'" (*CC*, 119). Menial workers belonging to the remote rural place Renupur and recruited from the Sealdah railway station, both of them are looked down by the scientists as the ignorant natives. Farley however senses that something unusual and sinister is happening at Cunningham's laboratory, the crucial information about the research experiments is presented to

him by the boy and the woman named Mangala. He also clandestinely witnesses a series of grotesque incidents in the laboratory's anteroom where Mangala beheads a dying pigeon. Mangala also presents to Farley the "revelation" (*CC*,128) that "what he sees is the creature's member entering the body of its mate, doing what men and women must do" (*CC*,128). Farley records in his letter that "everything is other than what it appears to be, a phantom of itself" (*CC*,129) and accompanies the assistant to Barich to know more about the bizarre incidents. Nothing more, however, is known about Farley. Police files reveal that he disembarked before his destination at Renupur and a young man was seen carrying his luggage. The vital information about the missing Farley is provided to Phulboni by the railway guard at Renupur that in 1894, the year in which Farley arrived in India and subsequently disappeared, an unknown foreigner died on the tracks at dawn: "The corpse was so mangled that they never discovered exactly who it was, but it was rumoured that he was a foreigner" (*CC*,232). To all extent, the unidentified foreigner was Farley. This tragic incident, however, is never recorded in any historical document. Farley's uncatalogued letter in Baltimore disappears mysteriously after Murugan has a glimpse of it. Antar's super-computer AVA reconstructs a "semblance of a narrative by running the retrieved fragments through a storyline algorithm" (*CC*, 108). Forever lost in cyberspace, Farley's last letter merely survives as an oral testimony because AVA could not perform a "continuous image conversion" (*CC*,108) as the text was corrupt: "The best she could do was provide a verbal rendition" (*CC*, 108). However, it does not prove that Farley knew about the role of the "flagellae" in sexual reproduction. The whole knowledge of it was thrust on him by Mangala. In another development, Cunningham resigned his position and left for England and Ross was transferred to Calcutta. The newspaper wrapping which contained Urmila's fish provides Murugan the vital information that D.D. Cunningham actually left for Madras as C.C. Dunn before Ross joined the Calcutta laboratory. For Murugan, it "was no accident [...] somebody worked pretty hard to set it up" (*CC*, 168). A few months after Farley's disappearance in May 1895, "'Lutchman' walked into Ronald Ross's lab in Secunderabad" (*CC*, 210).

The novel is so intricately orchestrated that one event finds its explication in the other. The straddling nature of the novel across various temporal and spatial boundaries enables Ghosh to interweave multiple narrative strands. The day on

which Murugan first arrives in Calcutta, August, 20, 1995, and meets Urmila Roy, the *Calcutta* reporter and Soinali Das, the famous writer Phulboni receives an award to mark his eighty-fifth birthday. Phulboni is the pen-name of Saiyad Murad Hussain. The speech which he delivers on the occasion is an apostrophe to the power of Silence. As the narrative unfolds, it transpires that he met with a strange experience as a young representative of a British firm in 1933 in Renupur. Compelled by circumstances, he decides to spend a heavy monsoon night in the deserted railway station of that remote village. His eyes fall upon a signal lantern, recently polished, a connecting link with the Grigson episode. As he loiters a bit, he chances upon an imprint of a left hand with four fingers and no thumb: "There was something just a little eerie and menacing about that strange outline, imprinted on the yellowing rush" (*CC*, 220). He falls asleep. When he awakes he finds that the signal-lantern is not in its original position but has moved some fifty yards down the railway track. As he rushes for the ever-distancing, fleeting station-master he narrowly averts a brush with death as a train speeds along the track. Precisely at that moment Phulboni "heard a scream, a raging, inhuman howl that tore through the stormy night. It hurled a single word into the wind — 'Laakhan' — and then it was silenced by the thunder of the speeding train" (*CC*, 227). He collapses in terror. He learns the next morning that the lantern never moved from its original position, the mechanism of the switching-lever has been dismantled years ago and there has been no station-master at Renupur for thirty years. As he touches the rail in a state of slumber, he is thrown off the tracks as another "train went hurtling over the siding, over the mattress that he had just been lying on, tearing it to shreds. This time the train was all too real" (*CC*, 231). As for Laakhan, he was a young boy "orphaned by famine, with a thin, wasted body and a deformed hand" (*CC*, 232) and lived in the station's signal-room. The upper-caste station-master slandered him to the villagers as "worse than untouchable" (*CC*, 233) and tried to kill the boy by switching the points and leading him before a train. In an ironic reversal, the station-master tripped on the rail and fell before an onrushing train. Laakhan finally found shelter at Sealdah station by a woman who found him. To cap it all, Phulboni also learns about the death of Elijah Farley who was placed in a similar situation as the writer but, unlike Phlboni, could not avoid his fate. Such is the impact of this incident on Phulboni that he becomes a devotee of Silence throughout his life.

Murugan's narrative about Lutchman/Laakhan begins with a sweeping statement that "he was all over the map, changing names, switching identities" (*CC*, 74). His narrative, and the subsequent interlocking ones, with the baffling duplication of names, places, events, seems endlessly to re-enact itself. The multiplicity of names of the same character as Lutchman/Laakhan at different places undermines the very logic of identity. The physical trait that they share is that of the deformed left hand with four fingers and no thumb. Interestingly, Phulboni's transcreation of his life-experiences into art titled *The Laakhan Stories* revolves around a character called "Laakhan". Laakhan plays a wide variety of roles in these stories which erases the notion of a discreet identity — "each character being different but also the same and all of them being mixed up and so on" (*CC*, 93). This notion of the double contests the Lockean principle of individuation, its relation to discrete chronological sequence or line and to the boundary-marking of individual identity through what Locke termed the "appropriation" of the proper name:

> The 'principle of individuation' accepted by Locke was that of existence at a particular locus in space and time; since, as he wrote, 'ideas become general by separating them from the circumstances of time and place', so they become particular only when both these circumstances are specified. In the same way the characters of the novel can only be individualized if they are set in a background of particularized time and place. (cited in Ian Watt, 21)

The proper name is an indicator of individual identity. In literature, expatiates Ian Watt, "this function of proper names was first fully established in the novel", with its attention to names as designating "completely individualized entities" so as to "suggest that they were to be regarded as particular individuals in the contemporary social environment" (18). *The Calcutta Chromosome* is replete with characters who have double names — Murugan/Morgan, Phulboni/Saiyad Murad Hussain, D.D. Cunningham/C.C. Dunn. The function of proper names as the boundary marker of individual identity is subverted in the novel.

The doubling of names is complemented by a strange repetition of similar events which transgresses the boundaries of both logic and chronology. The four eerie incidents involving the red signal-lantern and the railways triggered by Laakhan — the Grigson episode at Secunderabad, Farley's tragic end in 1894, Phulboni's weird experience in 1933 and the death of the class-conscious station-master — create an uncanny sense of conflations which disrupt the linear structure

of the narrative. Phulboni has two brushes with the train. The first can be interpreted as his fantasy and the train as a phantom but the second incident "was all too real" (*CC*, 231). The concrete evidence of this "real" episode is that the mattress on which he was lying before is torn to shreds. This blurring of the boundaries between "fiction" and the "real" within the literary text creates the effect of the uncanny. This reminds the reader of Viktor Shklovsky's conception of defamiliarization (ostranenie). The perceiver's beliefs and assumptions about the world and the nature of "reality" are challenged and the relationship between the perceiving subject and the object of perception is destabilized.

The complex nature of reality and its diversity is further established by Murugan's alternative history of malaria research. His is not only an unofficial history but a counter-epistemology bordering on mysticism which dismantles Western scientific rationality and empiricism. Unlike the western researchers like Farley, Grigson and Ross who recorded their observations in their diaries, this "other team" (*CC*, 88) headed by Mangala never maintained any records nor is itself recorded in any history book. There lies an unobtrusive silence about the team's representatives because "they're fringe people, marginal types; they're so far from the mainstream you can't see them from the shore" (*CC*, 88). Such is the inscrutability of the enigmatic Mangala that her true nature can never be wholly ascertained. She is a "dragon" (*CC*, 119) for Cunningham, "a false prophetess" (*CC*, 126) in the eyes of Farley, a "genius" (*CC*, 203) for Murugan. What is for sure is that the Western scientists are unwitting pawns in the hands of this group and they know how "to play their cards right" (*CC*, 89): "they know all about Ronnie, but neither Ronnie nor anyone else knows anything about them" (*CC*, 89). Mangala's knowledge about malaria parasites is not based on any scientific investigations but on intuition. Her power of observation — "piercing enquiry" (*CC*, 118-119) — and ability to correlate things is innate. As a free-spirit "who's completely out of the loop" (*CC*, 207) she is uncontaminated by any politics whatsoever as the scientists are:

> Biologists are under so much pressure to bring their findings into line with their politics: right-wing politicians sit on them to find genes for everything, from poverty to terrorism, so they'll have an alibi for castrating the poor or nuking the Middle East. The left goes ballistic if they say anything at all about the biological expression of human traits: it's all consciousness and soul at the end of the spectrum. (*CC*, 207)

Existing outside the elite domain of society and operating with silence and secrecy, this "other team" lacks the proper equipment and official support to progress further with their research. Hence, they "find a conventional scientist who'll give it a push" (*CC*, 89). What the narrative seems to suggest is that this indigenous cult's instinctive modes of knowing are intimately bound up with the analytical experiments of scientists. When Ross establishes the connection between malaria and the mosquito, he expresses his gratitude to "the Angel of Fate" (*CC*, 66) which is brushed aside by Murugan: "Angel of Fate my ass! With Ronnie it always has to be some Fat Cat way up in the sky: what's under his nose he can't see" (*CC*, 66). Interestingly, Ross "frequently brings religious imagery and allusions into his descriptions of scientific procedure" (Chambers, "Postcolonial Science Fiction", 60) throughout his *Memoirs*. Just as Ross depends, unknowingly, on the occult practicers, they too depend on Ross and official science to reach their aims. What is manifest here is a blurring of demarcations between science and counter-science, conventional and non-conventional modes of epistemology. Murugan celebrates this fusion of official and alternative, Western and indigenous forms of knowledge because human knowledge is anything but fixed and definite:

> 'Not making sense is what it's all about — conventional sense that is. Maybe this other team started with the idea that knowledge is self-contradictory; maybe they believed that to know something is to change it, therefore in knowing something, you've already changed what you think you know so you don't really know it at all: yoy only know it's history. Maybe they thought that knowledge couldn't begin without acknowledging the impossibility of knowledge.' (*CC*, 88)

In any knowledge situation, the subject confronts the object and the object is mediated by the subject resulting in the object's inevitable distortion. That is why authentic knowledge about the object always eludes the subject. This idealist premise of knowledge is further expatiated by Murugan in his correlation of knowledge with change: "if it's true that to know something is to change it, then it follows that one way of changing something — of effecting a mutation, let's say — is to attempt to know it, or aspects of it" (*CC*, 88). The torch-bearers of counter-science are secretive and silent not only because they are subalterns but also because it is their "technique or procedure": "because to communicate, to put ideas into language would be to establish a claim to *know* — which is the first thing that a counter-science would dispute" (*CC*, 88). What is questioned is the

transparency of language as a means of communication and the equation of language with meaning. If by being expressed/communicated knowledge is distorted, then the whole system of language is circumspect. They uphold a mode of epistemology that cannot be represented or mediated by either language or scientific empiricism. The novel examines the idea that narratives claiming to be factual and empirical as histories are "not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure" (Hutcheon 105). Hence their distrust of verbalization becomes absolute and the language of counter-science is silence. In a metafictional aside, the text questions the validity of its own discursive strategies and hints at its own open-endedness and inconclusiveness i.e. silence.

Murugan's alternative history of malaria research and his account of Mangala find its literary echo in Phulboni's narrative. Phulboni's weird experience in the Renupur railway station propels him to chronicle a sequence of stories involving Laakhan. The Laakhan stories are not ordinary creations, believes Mrs. Aratounian, but "a message to someone; to remind them of something — some kind of shared secret" (*CC*, 94). Phulboni's uncanny experience launches him into a profound mystical realization into the real nature of the eerie silence: "Mistaken are those who imagine that silence is without life; that it is inanimate, without either spirit or voice. It is not: indeed the Word is to this silence what the shadow is to the foreshadowed, what the veil is to the eyes, what the mind is to truth, what language is to life" (*CC*, 24). Phulboni has attempted a translation of his experience into art that registers the shock of the uncanny. The eloquent speech in which he registers his relationship with the deity of silence is a wonderful illustration of language as performative in Austin's Speech-act theory: "By every means available, I have sought her, the ineluctable, ever-elusive mistress of the unspoken, wooed her courted her, begged to join the circle of her initiates" (*CC*, 104). The alternative historical archive that Murugan constructs is actually a patchwork of colonial documents, correspondences, newspapers as well as folk legends, literary manifestations and hearsays. The point at issue is the extent to which fiction can emerge as an alternative discourse for expressing the subaltern. Murugan's venture is to uncover the hidden historical records i.e. the "silence" of historiography; Phulboni tries to represent the unrepresentable in the language of fiction i.e. the "silence" of his elusive quest. The question that engages Murugan is a fundamental issue for a literary artist:"I

have never known [...] whether life lies in words or in images, in speech or sight. Does a story come to be in the words that I conjure out of my mind or does it live already, somewhere, enshrined in mud clay — in an image, that is, in the crafted mimicry of life" (*CC*, 189)? The story/legend that Phulboni graphically presents in his fiction also exists in the oral narration of a clay-artist in Kalighat enshrined in the image/figurine of an occult goddess Mangala: "'Phulboni [...] was no longer sure which had happened first or whether they were all aspects of the coming of that image into the world: its presence in the mud, the writing of his story, that bather's discovery or the tale he had just heard, in Kalighat'" (*CC*, 190). In a self-reflexive stance, Phulboni draws attention to his own fictional methods of representation. In an attempt to move freely between language and life, Phulboni honours the contention that all things in a narrative "are mediated through words, yet acknowledge that certain things are logically prior to those words, a matter which they mediate". These things cannot be isolated as a "species of prior content seeking an appropriate form, since they will include ideas, insights and compositional commitments not definable as content" (Bradbury, 8-9). Be that as it may, Phulboni is in eternal pursuit of that elusive silence, his muse, and hints at metempsychosis, the secret cult of the "other team", in his birthday lecture:

> 'The silence of the city [...] has sustained me through all my years of writing: kept me alive in the hope that it would claim me too before my ink ran dry. For more years than I can count I have wandered the darkness of these streets, searching for the unseen presence that reigns over this silence, striving to be taken in, begging to be taken across before my time runs out. The time of the crossing is at hand, I know, and that is why I am here now, standing in front of you: to beg — to appeal to the mistress of this silence, that most secret of deities, to give me what she has so long denied: to show herself to me.' (*CC*, 27)

The "time of crossing" signifies the end of physical existence. It is also the moment when the soul transmigrates from one body to another, an unnatural event which Phulboni desires. The "mistress of this silence" (*CC*, 27) finally grants him his wish and Phulboni's quest for corporeal immortality is fulfilled. It is this reincarnation that the "other team" steered by Mangala so seriously pursue, this transmigration of souls which Murugan tries to register in his alternative discourse confounding the claims of scientific rationalism: "'when your body fails you, you leave it, you migrate — you or at least a matching symptomology of your self. You

begin all over again, another body, another beginning'" (*CC*, 91). What this establishes is the eternal return of the same.

The marginalized, elusive band of initiates, Murugan's "other team", are concerned with a counter-epistemology of much greater significance: "the ultimate transcendence of nature", "a technology for interpersonal transference" (*CC*, 90). Mystics as they are, their spiritual conceptions of self transcendence erode Western empirical methodologies and the Enlightenment notion of autonomous subjectivity. Mangala's primary interest is not in the processes of malaria transmission but transference of information "chromosomally, from body to body" (*CC*, 91). What Mangala has intuitively "stumbled on" (*CC*, 206) is "an item that is to the standard Mendelian pantheon of twenty-three chromosomes what Ganesh is to the gods; that is, different, non-standard, unique" (*CC*, 206). Hence it eludes research methodologies and for want of a better term, Murugan calls it "the Calcutta Chromosome" (*CC*, 206). The chromosome in question is transmitted from one generation to the next not by sexual reproduction but by a process of recombination. What is more, it is particular to every individual and "exists in non-regenerating tissue: [...] the brain" (*CC*, 207). What Murugan calls "the Calcutta Chromosome" is termed in philosophical circles as "Faculty X", "that latent power that human beings possess *to reach beyond the present*": "Faculty X is a sense of reality, the reality of other places and other times, and it is the possession of it — fragmentary and uncertain though it is — that distinguishes man from all other animals"; "it is the power to grasp reality, and it unites the two halves of man's mind, conscious and subconscious" (Wilson, 59). What Wilson emphasizes is the development of man's instinctive powers along with the intellect. It is Faculty X which unites intelligence and instinct. Celebrating the instinctive life forces and acknowledging the antagonism of spirit and matter in the vitalist theory of life's evolution, Wilson affirms the absoluteness of human individuality:

> We have only to concede that individuality transcends the physical body — that is, to recognize that, like death, it is a tool of life, not an accidental consequence — to see that logic is in favour of some form of 'life after death', as well as of reincarnation. The whole purpose of life's campaign against matter is to establish continuity, to overcome 'forgetfulness'; this is the purpose behind instinct and racial memory and the DNA code. These are all forms of survival of bodily death; if other forms did not exist, it would be, to say the least, an extraordinary waste of opportunity. (578)

Mangala, the subaltern, fights back not with the assertion of the ego but with the magical powers arising from the subconscious. The vital difference between Eastern and Western thinking is well formulated by Jung: "There is no conflict between religion and Science in the East, because no science is there based upon the passion for facts and no religion upon mere faith; there is religious cognition and cognitive religion (*The Portable Jung*, 485-486). T sum it all up, as the supreme-being in control of this clandestine order, Mangala is "not in this because she wants to be a scientist. She's in this because she thinks she's a god. And what that means is that she wants to be the mind that sets things in motion" (*CC*, 209). Intimately tied up with this is her desire to "try and tell us about her own history" (*CC*, 209). What is manifest here is the emergence of different life-worlds and the subaltern as the active agent/subject in her own narrative.

The relationship between the science of Western empiricism and the counter-science of the Indian mystics is antipodal. This, in Murugan's elegant terminology, is analogous to the relation between "matter and anti-matter,...rooms and anterooms and Christ and anti-Christ"(*CC*, 88). Moreover, the cult of counter-science is a global phenomenon transcending temporal and spatial disjuncture. Murugan recounts to Urmila the life of a Hungarian "amateur archaeologist" and "professional eccentric" (*CC*, 170) Countess Pongrácz, who settled in Egypt in her last years. Interestingly, she seems to have been "al-Magari, the Hungarian" (*CC*, 5) whom Antar met in Egypt in his childhood — a brilliant tiny thread which seamlessly weaves the novel. Countess Pongrácz was in Madras in 1898 and became the disciple of a Finnish Mme Liisa Salminen who had a little outfit called the Society of Spiritualists. Mme Salminen's group was in fact a suppressed cult, the "arch-rival" (*CC*, 171) of Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society. Anyway, the common element that unites these opposing sects was a strong Anglophobia. They overturn the exclusiveness of Western discourses which occlude the East and deny it a voice and challenge the monism of Western attitudes. It is at Mme Salminen's altar that D.D. Cunningham alias C.C. Dunn is sacrificed as a part of the ritual to the deity of Silence. All this information, however, survives not as a written account but on the Countesse's oral testimony. Under Mme Salminen's tutelage, Countess Pongrácz became a leading advocate of the teachings of Valentinus, the Alexandrian philosopher of the early Christian

era, a champion of dualism. She also excavated the archaeological sites of the two most vital dualistic sects — the Manichaean and the Nestorian, thus overriding the monism of either Christian theology or European Enlightenment. What is more, the message is sometimes so obvious that there is scarcely any need of a written testament:

> When she asserted that it was Mme Salminen who had revealed to her the truth of the Valentinian cosmology, in which the ultimate deities are the Abyss and the Silence, the one being male and the other female, the one representing mind and the other truth, few disputed her account of the matter, for these beliefs clearly did not merit a prosaic explanation. (*CC*, 177)

The alternate history of these disempowered subjects is retrieved from the excerpt of a book about Countess Pongrácz by a Czech psycholinguist, the Countess's disjointed and incoherent records of séances in her diary which are a linguistic puzzle, and the newspaper scraps in Urmila's hands. However, the veracity of these documents is questioned by the chronicler Murugan himself when he questions the reliability of the Countess as a witness and whether "an accurate narrative can be constructed from the skeletal word-associations of her diary" (*CC*, 174). In the narrative's circular structure the "irrational", "incomprehensible" practice of human sacrifice reappears again, this time in Calcutta, as C.C. Dunn's position is taken up by Romen Haldar. Mrs. Aratounian, the owner of a nursery and Murugan's landlady, is the present day incarnation of Mangala. Murugan's bizarre account of this mystical sect emphasizes the cyclical pattern of the world of time.

A recurring trope in Ghosh's rich oeuvre is the significant role played by chance and coincidence. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is no exception to this. Ross's breakthrough into one of the most intriguing puzzles in medical research is a fortuitous event. Murugan's archival creation is based on a series of apparently disjointed incidents which ultimately form an intricate pattern seamlessly interlocking the colonial past, Murugan's present in Calcutta and Antar's future in New York. Ghosh himself confesses that his envisaged design in the novel was to "integrate the past and the present" (cited in Hawley, 157): "I think it's a pity that science fiction always seeks to project into the future: it's just as interesting to project into the past" (cited in Hawley, 144). The result is a complex narrative based on a Chinese box structure where one box continuously interferes with the

other and an event in one part of the world finds its reverberation in another part, with chance playing a vital role. Antar's introduction to Tara by Maria and the fragmentary display of Murugan's ID card on Antar's computer screen are driven by coincidences. In Calcutta, Murugan's accidental meeting with Sonali and Phulboni at Rabindra Sadan on a rainy day precisely on the occasion of Phulboni's 85th birthday celebrations is triggered by chance. Chance propels Murugan to board Robinson Guest House owned by none other than Mrs. Aratounian herself. What is more, Mrs. Aratounian's guest house is in the same street where Ross lived in the past and where a large, old colonial mansion stands where Mrs. Aratounian performs her séances. Romen Halder's residence is an important locale in the narrative because it draws Murugan and Urmila together. Urmila plays a vital role in Murugan's alternative discourse because by sheer chance the newspapers which wrapped her fish contain information regarding the lost traces of D.D. Cunningham. The mysterious fish-vendor who appeared from nowhere at Urmila's doorsteps and vanished without a trace is the "grinning, gap-toothed" (*CC*, 35) urchin with a printed T-shirt who always stuck to Murugan's footsteps. Urmila initiates Murugan into another startling discovery when she coincidentally finds a clay figurine of Mangala-bibi in the hands of a little girl — the statuette of a woman with a bird in one hand and microscope in the other. Moreover, the girl blurts out an important piece of information which borders on the verge of a religious legend: "'Today is the last day of the puja of Mangala-bibi. Baba says that tonight Mangala-bibi is going to enter a new body'" (*CC*, 194). Sonali Das occupies a pivotal position in the narrative because she unveils a few enigmas at key moments. She provides an eye-witness's account of Mrs. Aratounian's rituals in the crumbling old building which explains Romen Halder's sudden disappearance. Urmila learns about Phulboni's weird experiences at Renupur from Sonali which she later passes on to Murugan. What is more as Phulboni's daughter she knows the reason why Phulboni wandered about in the streets praying for the mercy of the deity of Silence because he betrayed their forbidden secret to Sonali's mother in an emotionally charged moment. Romen's role in the narrative is not as crucial as the two women but with his "thumb lying stiffly curled against the palm" (*CC*, 54) and one of the hands partly paralysed connects him with the Laakhan of the past. The occult tradition transcends national boundaries when Antar senses an unusual air in his neighbour Tara's

apartment. The way Lucky bends as a supplicant in the front door in front of Tara and touches his forehead to her feet reminds the reader of the devotees around Mangala's feet "in various attitudes of supplication, some touching her feet, others lying prostrate" (*CC*, 125). Moreover, the connecting link between Tara and Mangala, in spite of their temporal and spatial separatedness, is the flapping of a pigeon. Lucky's "fixed smile and his oddly-spaced teeth" (*CC*, 160) relates him with the "grinning, gap-toothed" (*CC*, 35) boy in Calcutta. In another interesting parallel, Mangala found Laakhan at Sealdah Station; Lucky hails from the Penn Station news-stand. The trope of the railway station connects so many characters in the narrative. Cunningham picked up Mangala and Laakhan at Sealdah in the colonial past; there are numerous weird experiences at Renupur involving Laakhan which connect Elijah Farley, the caste-conscious station master and Phulboni; Antar goes for his usual evening walks to Penn Station; Mrs. Aratounian takes the train to Renupur from Sealdah; the trio of Murugan, Sonali and Urmila converge at Sealdah where Murugan's research ends. This subtle intertwining of so many threads in the narrative reflects the superb craftsmanship of the novelist.

This inter-locking narrative is structured around a series of interrelated quests which are displaced both in time and space: Ross's for the malarial parasite, Grigson's for Laakhan's identity, Farley's for Cunningham's, Murugan's for the mystical sect behind Ross's discovery, Antar's for Murugan, Sonali's for Romen Haldar, Phulboni's for "Silence". The narrative switches intermittently between Calcutta and New York and jumps to the colonial past of Secunderabad, and through Antar's memory and Murugan's research in Egypt. The inevitable result is a sprawling narrative without a controlling centre. These shifts in time highlight the vital distinction between duration-time as opposed to event-time or "the time of the story and the time of the discourse" (Genette, 29). In Shlomith Rimmon-Keenan's neat formulation, "time in narrative fiction [...] as the relations of chronology between story and text" (44) can be divided into two segments — "story-time" and "text-time"(44). The narrative begins and ends in Antar's apartment in New York in an unspecified moment in the 21st century which serves as the framing narrative. The "story-time" however commences in the middle of the 19th century in India's colonial past. The "text-time" which chiefly focuses on Murugan's research in Calcutta is a matter of two days — August, 20, 1995 and

the day after. If viewed chronologically there are three main time zones in the novel — the colonial past in which Ronald Ross undertakes the malarial research and Phulboni has his brush with the mysterious train at Renupur; the Calcutta of 1995 where Murugan conducts his research and the indefinite time in New York where Antar surveys on his computer. The novel, however, ends with the hint that Antar's "crossing" is at hand. In a self-reflexive stance Murugan averred to Urmila that the chain of interpersonal transferences is not a "closed [...] list" and it's not going to "end": "See, for them, writing 'The End' to this story is the way they hope to trigger the quantum leap into the next" (*CC*, 180). A staunch champion of the cult of the "counter-science", Murugan suggests an endless chromosomal repersonalization, and an eternal whirligig of identities, spaces and time-zones leading to endless repetitions. The novel is thus situated both "in" time and "out" of time. In this predicament, any authoritative, rational, knowledgeable claim is a delirium, and every discovery contains the seeds of its own subversion pointing to the subtitle of the novel.

In a narrative in which the notion of discreet, autonomous selves is dissolved, scientific authority is annexed from the West by the Eastern occult traditions, the erasure of instinctive modes of knowledge by rational, empirical epistemology, the linear conception of time is obfuscated, the authority of the central narrative "voice" of Murugan comes in for a close scrutiny especially when he is gradually moving into a syphilitic dementia. Murugan's alternative discourse of malaria research is a patchwork of heterogeneous documents whose authenticity cannot be taken for granted: newspaper scraps; a letter lost in cyberspace which exists as a "binary 'ghost'" (*CC*, 106) of which Ava "reconstructed a semblance of a narrative by running the retrieved fragments through a storyline algorithm. But she was unable to vouch for the authenticity of the resolved text" (*CC*, 108); a book excerpt, a fragmentary record from Countess Pongráczs'; the Countess's diary, itself a linguistic enigma. There are so many oral testimonies that Murugan depends upon. Urmila narrates to Murugan Phulboni's bizarre experiences at Renupur but she herself heard about it from Sonali after a series of tellings: "she told me something: a story she'd heard from her mother, about something that happened to Phulboni many years ago" (*CC*, 211). Murugan's discourse itself exists orally, in his meandering narratives to Antar and Urmila. The exuberantly digressive nature of Murugan's narrative

recalls the oral rendering of Indian epics but its veracity itself is subject to debate. Murugan himself cannot vigorously endorse the "truth" of his own narrative because there is a lurking belief in his mind that he is merely an instrument in the hands of a higher authority:

> 'The truth is [...] that I don't know. But a couple of things are clear enough. Someone's trying to get us to make some connections; they're trying to tell us something; something they don't want to put together themselves, so that when we get to the end we'll have a whole new story.' (*CC*, 179)

Such is the inscrutability of the unknown powers that Murugan can never speak with certainty the nature and purpose of their cult: "'I'm not absolutely sure [...] but I guess I could sketch one possible scenario'" (*CC*, 179). He names Mangala's theory and practice of metempsychosis "The Calcutta Chromosome" (*CC*, 203), but interestingly enough, is sceptical about "'whether it exists or has ever existed. At this point in time it's still all guesswork on my part'" (*CC*, 203). It is only at the end of the novel that Murugan realizes that his "part in this was to tie some threads together so that they could hand the whole package over in a neat little bundle some time in the future, to whoever it is they're waiting for'" (*CC*, 253). In a moment of apocalyptic revelation, Murugan recognizes that although he is the prime investigator and the controlling narrative voice, he himself is excluded from the fusion and interplay of the other narratives in the hermeneutic circle set in motion: "'for them the only way to escape the tyranny of knowledge is to turn it on himself. But for that to work they have to create a single perfect moment of discovery when the person who discovers is also that which is discovered. The problem with me is that I know too much and too little'" (*CC*, 253). When he realizes that Urmila is the one "chosen" by the occult for interpersonal transference, he re-enacts Lucky's posture to Tara. "Bending low", Murugan "touched his forehead to her feet": "'Don't forget me. [...] If you have it in your power to change the script, write me in. Don't leave me behind. Please'" (*CC*, 254). Murugan's research is thus complete as by acting as a go-between from science to counter-science, East and West, and one narrative to the other he binds them in a complex web.

Emphasizing the circularity of time as well as its own structure, the concluding pages of the narrative return to where it started — Antar's flat in New York. As the foci of the framing narrative and surveying the world from the

vantage point of his electronic device, Antar seems to be immune from the web itself and any involvement in the ever-expanding gulf of interpersonal transference whatsoever. The narrative's conclusion undermines this contention. Ava's "chance" stumbling upon Murugan's ID Card, presumed to be the initiating moment in the process of investigation is finally revealed to be not a coincidence but Murugan's deliberate attempt to contact Antar. It is Antar's "crossing" that is at hand as Murugan utters "'[I]t's your funeral'" (*TCC*, 255). Interestingly, Murugan asserted the same to him years ago in a Thai restaurant: "'I'll turn a few pages for you; but remember, it was you who asked. It's your funeral'" (*TCC*, 50). Antar's room seems to be filled with voices and he recognizes Tara and Maria whose fluid identities need to be established. Maria, the Guyanese clerk in a Chelsea used-clothes store and Tara, the Indian emigrant looking for a job, when first described, present a beautiful study in contrast:

> Tara was small and bird-like, with a fine-boned beak of a noise. She was youngish — in her thirties, Antar reckoned — a good deal younger than Maria...
>
> The two women made an interesting contrast, although they seemed very easy with each other. Maria was tall, stately, and unfailingly well-dressed, although she barely made minimum wage. Tara on the other hand seemed so uncomfortable in Western clothes that it was clear she'd just arrived. (*CC*, 14)

Within the next few pages after Antar meets Tara and Maria in New York, Murugan meets two hyphenated characters in Calcutta, Urmila and Sonali Das:

> Taken by surprise, Murugan looked up and down the glass-fronted hall. It was still empty. Then he noticed two women running up the stairs. They came pelting into the hall and stood by the door, wiping the rain from their hair and shaking it off their sarees. One of them was in her mid-twenties, a thin aquiline woman with a fine-bored face, dressed in a limp, rather bedraggled saree. TRhe other was taller and older, in the beginnings of a youthful middle age, darkly handsome and quietly elegant, in a black saree. She had a broad streak of white running all the way down her shoulder-length hair. (*CC*, 21-22)

This interesting parallel reinforces the notion of character transfer in the novel. While Antar and Murugan are intimately connected, the viable connection between Tara and Urmila is subtly hinted at. Urmila and Tara seem to be affectionately tied with Murugan and Antar respectively and act as active partners in their investigations. The weird connection between these two women is made explicit in the last lines of the novel when Tara whispers to Antar: "'Keep

watching, we're here; we're all with you [...] you're not alone; we'll help you across'" (*CC*, 256). This prophetic note of reassurance echoes Urmila's assertions to Murugan and Sonali: "'Don't worry [...] I'll take you both with me, wherever I go'" (*CC*, 254). The resemblance and continuity between Sonali and Urmila and Maria and Tara become clear when the latter duo are described as wearing saris:

> Now Murugan was standing in the lobby of a large auditorium and two women ware running up the stairs. They came closer and suddenly Antar recognized Tara — except that she was in a saree. She was talking to Maria who was wearing a saree too. (*CC*, 256)

The chromosomal switch/glide of identities is thus expostulated. The narrative thus establishes a chain of interpersonal female transferences from Mangala - Mme. Salminen - Mrs. Aratounian – Urmila - Tara. These female figures when viewed as a composite group evoke two distinct emotive responses. While Mangala, Mme. Salminen and Mrs. Aratounian generate a sense of dread in their onlookers, Urmila and Tara offer warmth and sympathy. The women characters in themselves manifest the duality of Jung's archetypal Great Mother:

> The qualities associated with it are maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility. The place of magic transformation and rebirth, together with the underworld and its inhabitants, are presided over by the mother. On the negative side, the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate. (Jung, *Collected Works*, 82)

These female voices engulf Antar as he sits feverishly on his chair. The baton of malaria research passes on to a new investigator. When Antar "sighed as he hadn't sighed in years" (*CC*, 256), he only reminds the reader of Phulboni's eloquent meditations on "silence": "'I know that time is running out — my time and her time. I know that the crossing is nigh; I know it to be at hand'" (*CC*, 104-105). Antar's days as a detached observer are over and his time as a feverish investigator is initiated as the process of malaria research is an eternal one. The hermeneutic play of metempsychosis begins anew. The novel looks forward to a utopia, into a silent society based on the dissolution of selves.

Chapter Six

Not at Home in Empire

The Glass Palace

Imperialism is a depraved choice of national life, imposed by self-seeking interests which appeal to the lusts of quantitative acquisitiveness and of forceful domination surviving in a nation from early centuries of animal struggle for existence. — J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*

It (modern oppression) is a battle between dehumanized self and the objectified enemy, the technological bureaucrat and his reified victim, pseudo-rulers and their fearsome other selves projected on to their 'subjects'. — Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*

Each of Amitav Ghosh's novels is distinct from the other. While *The Calcutta Chromosome* subverts official medical historiography by unearthing an erased Oriental occult tradition, *The Glass Palace* (2000), his next novel, is a family chronicle centred in Burma, India and the Malay Archipelago across several generations and historical epochs. Ghosh's "most commercially successful" (Mondal, 14) novel has had a diverse critical reception. While Rakhee Moral straitjackets the novel as a "postcolonial narrative" (139), Anshuman A. Mondal categorizes it as a "grand historical romance" (15). For Rukmini Bhaya Nair the novel is "condemned to record the exit-ential dilemma — wherein the subject is necessarily partitioned, a bewildered immigrant never quite in focus nor contained within the frame" (162). In a similar vein, Rakhi Nara and G.A. Ghanashyam interpret the novel as "an elegy for the diasporic condition" (96). In stark contrast to all these views, N.K. Rajalakshmi believes that the novel "disclose(s) the undercurrents of power discourse in everyday existence of human life" (115). Given the substantial nature of the work it comes as no surprise that *The Glass Palace* should receive such a wide range of critical interpretations.

Like the other novels of Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace* too has received international recognition. It won the Grand Prize for Fiction at the Frankfurt International e-Book Awards. The novel also won the best book award for the

Eurasian region of the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2001. Interestingly, Ghosh spurned the award on ideological grounds:

> I have on many occasions publicly stated my objections to the classification of books such as mine under the term 'Commonwealth Literature'. Principal among these is that this phrase anchors an area of contemporary writing not within the realities of the present day, nor within the possibilities of the future, but rather within a disputed aspect of the past. (Ghosh's Letter to the Commonwealth Foundation", 1)

His repudiation of the Commonwealth Prize springs from his anticolonial spirit which he states in unambiguous terms:

> That the past engenders the present is of course undeniable; it is equally undeniable that the reasons why I write in English are ultimately rooted in my country's history. [...] The issue of how the past is to be remembered lies at the heart of *The Glass Palace* and I feel that I would be betraying the spirit of my book if I were to allow it to be incorporated within that particular memorialization of Empire that passes under the rubric of 'the Commonwealth'. (1)

No wonder he rejects the post-colonial writing movement which reconfigures the historical project of invasion and exploitation as a symbiotic encounter. More importantly, Ghosh explores the split-self of an individual under the impact of colonialism.

Like *In An Antique Land*, *The Glass Palace* explores the effects of history on individual lives. "Historiography", contends Kundera, "writes the history of society, not of man" (37). Reflecting on the relationship between novel and history, he observes that "[n]ot only must historical circumstance create a new existential situation for a character in a novel, but history *itself* must be understood and analyzed as an existential situation" (38). For Ghosh, what is "interesting" about "history in terms of a novel is that history gives us particular predicaments which are unique predicaments, not repeatable in time and place" (Vijay Kumar, 101). In a text which straddles the boundaries of fiction and history, Ghosh concentrates on the family as the central unit because it is a surrogate for the nation. For Ghosh, the family, however, is not static but continuously on the move. It cuts across rigid national boundaries, thereby subverting the fixity of the modernist concept of the "nation". This perfectly accords with his observation that "families can actually span nations" (Aldama, 89). By creating a generic amalgam Ghosh delineates his philosophy of Indian history:

> For me, at some point it became very important that this book encapsulates in it the ways in which people cope with defeat,

> because this has really been our history for a long, long time: the absolute fact of defeat and the absolute fact trying to articulate defeat to yourself and trying to build a culture around the centrality of defeat. (Aldama, 89)

This experience is not a unique one because it is also felt by the indigenous peoples in Australia, the Americas and other parts of the world. "But around defeat", avers Ghosh, "there's love, there's laughter, there's happiness. [...] There are children. There are relationships. There's betrayal. There's faithfulness. This is what life is, and I want my book to be true to that" (Aldama, 89). Evidently what Ghosh tries to reconcile are the "analytical" histories utilizing the rational categories of modern historical thought and the "affective" histories which account for the plural ways of being-in-the-world. After all, history and fiction, as modes of narrative, mediate "the world for the purpose of introducing meaning" (E.L. Doctorow, cited. in Hutcheon, 112).

In *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh engages directly with colonialism and its aftermath. The narrative begins with the British invasion of Burma and the expansion of the Empire. Britain and Burma are locked into a power relationship and a discourse of race in which each objectifies the other. This empire of domination is consolidated by an organized military network which has an extensive reach. What smoothes the path of Britain's annexation is the disintegration of the Burmese army and the betrayal of a couple of the Burmese King Thebaw's ministers. Britain's colonial rule over Burma is established by the British Indian Army. The people of a colonized nation thus help their colonial masters to protect and expand their territory: "There were some ten thousand soldiers in the British invasion force and of these the great majority — about two-thirds — were Indian sepoys" (*The Glass Palace*, 26). The narrative explores the effects of colonial hegemony as the sagacious Saya John reads the minds of these psychologically demented soldiers, the tools of Empire:

> For a few coins they would allow their masters to use them as they wished, to destroy every trace of resistance to the power of the English. It always amazed me: Chinese peasants would never do this — allow themselves to be used to fight other people's wars with so little profit for themselves. [...] How do you fight an enemy who fights from neither enmity nor anger, but in submission to orders from superiors, without protest and without conscience? (*GP*, 29-30)

The British annex Burma to strengthen their economic network. Colonialism is a lucrative politico-commercial enterprise inextricably tied with capitalism. Denis

Judd argues in his book *Empire: The British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present* that "[n]o one can doubt that the desire for profitable trade, plunder and enrichment was the primary force that led to the establishment of the imperial structure" (3). The British take control of the political power in Rangoon to strengthen their economic position. They are primarily concerned with the exploitation of the source of capital. Saya John's son Matthew makes this explicit to Rajkumar: "'There's going to be a war. Father says they want all the teak in Burma. The King won't let them have it so they're going to do away with him'" (*GP*, 15). The narrative thus begins with the shift of power from the Burmese monarch to its British counterpart as the people languish under colonial domination.

The Burmese Royal family has had a gory history. A man of scholarly inclination, King Thebaw is completely disinterested in the political affairs of the state. He owes his succession to the throne to the fatal intervention of his step-mother as well as mother-in-law, the Alenandaw Queen, an expert at palace intrigue. The real power behind the throne is Thebaw's haughty chief consort Queen Supayalat. The Queen is an enigma, lovable as well as detestable. Disregarding the protocols of palace intrigue Supayalat "fell headlong in love" with Thebaw. What is more, his "ineffectual good nature seemed to inspire a maternal ferocity in her" (*GP*, 38). To secure the throne for her husband, the same Queen, stripping her ruthless mother of all her powers, ordered the killing of all potential rivals in the Royal Family: "Seventy-nine princes were slaughtered on her orders, some of them new-born infants, and some too old to walk. To prevent the spillage of royal blood she had them wrapped in carpets and bludgeoned to death" (*GP*, 39). Demonic cruelty paradoxically coexists with feminine tenderness in Supayalat. Her wickedness stems from a typically feminine attribute — her love of and ambition for her husband. It is true that personally she is ambitious, but her ambition lies more in seeing great things for her husband than in acquiring rank and possession for herself. It is Supayalat's uncompromising attitude that results in hostility with the British; Thebaw was all for appeasement. The spirit of defiance of the colonial authority is evident in the publicly announced "Royal Proclamation" which rings with the rhetoric of resistance and counter-racism:

> To all Royal subjects and inhabitants of the Royal Empire: those heretics, the barbarian English Kalaas having most harshly made demands calculated to bring about the

> impairment and destruction of our religion, the violation of our national traditions and customs, and the degradation of our race, are making a show and preparation as if about to wage war with our state. (*GP*, 15)

But now with the battle fought and lost, the sovereign Royal Family is stripped off all its powers and sent on exile to India. The stoical Thebaw ponders about how this sudden shift of power dismantles all existing edifices:

> This is how power is eclipsed: in a moment of vivid realism, between the waning of one fantasy of governance and its replacement by the next; in an instant when the world springs free of its moorings of dreams and reveals itself to be girdled in the pathways of survival and self-preservation. (*GP*, 41-42)

The dethroning of the King erases the difference between the ruler and his subjects which is evident in the common people's looting the royal palace. With the arrival of the victorious British troops, the common people enter the palace compound, an erstwhile forbidden zone, and ransack it: "the guards and sentries were all gone. The palace was unguarded [...]. People began to tumble through, like water over the lip of a spout" (*GP*, 31-32). Their loot is paradoxically accompanied by their ceremonious sheiko before the Queen. Supayalat, universally detested for her cruelty and ruthlessness, is suddenly transformed in the people's eyes "through the alchemy of defeat" (*GP*, 34). Her resistance to the colonial army has aroused the patriotic spirit of her subjects which elicits their spontaneous respect:

> For the first time in her reign she had become what a sovereign should be, the proxy of her people [....] Were she meekly to accept her defeat none would be so deeply ashamed as they. It was as though they were entrusting her with the burden of their own immediate defiance. (*GP*, 34)

Thebaw is, however, provided an inglorious exit by the British. His ceremonious canopy is given seven tiers which is the number allotted to a nobleman, not the nine due to a king. Not content with the crushing defeat over the Royal army, the British pile on their revenge: "In his last encounter with his erstwhile subjects he was to be publicly demoted, like an errant schoolchild" (*GP*, 43-44). For Thebaw, of all the "affronts" that he could imagine, this is "the most hurtful, the most egregious" (*GP*, 44). On his way to India, the King reflects on the fate of empires and of exiles. In Rangoon itself, the British transported more Indians than there were Burmese to do menial jobs. The Burmese have been a static community, but colonialism has displaced them from their roots. Thebaw ponders about "[w]hat

vast, what incomprehensible power, to move people in such huge numbers from one place to another — emperors, kings, farmers, dockworkers, soldiers, coolies, policemen. Why? Why this furious movement — people taken from one place to another, to pull rickshaws, to sit blind in exile?" (*GP*, 50). The British deposed Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal emperor to Rangoon. In a neat reversal, Thebaw, the last Burmese King, is sent on exile to India.

The Royal Family is imprisoned in Outram House in Ratnagiri, their confinement sustained by the political logic of imperialism. Their authority in Burma is usurped by the British. In spite of their lost power and glory, Thebaw and Supayalat hold on to their manners and customs as a mark of resistance against colonial authority. Although Thebaw learnt some English from Anglican missionaries, his spiritual outlook towards life is moulded by his training as a Buddhist monk. Not surprisingly he clings on to his indigenous lifestyle. Resolute as she is, Supayalat refuses to succumb to her transformed exilic circumstances and insists on the maintenance of the old Mandalay protocols, "the shikoes, the crawling [...] she wouldn't hear of any changes. She was the Queen of Burma, she said, and if she didn't insist on being treated properly how could she expect anyone else to give her her due" (*GP*,55)? An incarnation of obduracy and pride, Supayalat demonstrates her defiance of the British authority at her cold reception of the new District Collector B.P. Dey and his wife Uma:

> This was the Queen's way of preserving the spirit of Mandalay protocol: since the representatives of the British were adamant in their refusal to perform the shiko, she in turn made a point of not acknowledging their entry into her presence. (*GP*, 106)

Smarting at humiliation, Thebaw and Supayalat are staunch critics of the colonizing structure. While the King extols the victory of Japan, "an Eastern country" over Russia, "a European power" (GP, 107), the Queen scoffs at the imminent defilement of her native country. An anticolonial nationalist, she unfavourably contrasts the present destitute condition of Burma with its haloed past:

> In a few decades the wealth will be gone — all the gems, the timber and the oil — and then they (the British) too will leave. In our golden Burma where no one ever went hungry and no one was too poor to write and read, all that will remain is destitution and ignorance, famine and despair. We were the first to be imprisoned in the name of their progress; millions more will follow. (*GP*, 88)

Colonialism is inseparable from expansionist capitalism. Moreover, the concept of the Western nations as representing the best of human civilization legitimates colonial expansion. It degenerates into an ideology of racial hatred in the colonies. European nationalism, explains Partha Chatterjee, is "part of the same historical process which saw the rise of industrialism and democracy". It represents "the attempt to actualize in political terms the universal urge for liberty and progress" (*Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, 2). There is, however, a conflict right at the heart of nationalism which Chatterjee terms the "liberal dilemma": nationalism may promise liberty and universal suffrage to the colonizers but undemocratic forms of government and domination to the colonized. Supayalat unravels to the Collector this ambiguity in Western thought which is used quite deliberately to dupe the colonial subject:

> We have heard so many lectures from you and your colleagues on the subject of the barbarity of the Kings of Burma and the humanity of the Angrez; we were tyrants you said, enemies of freedom, murderers. The English alone understand liberty, we were told; they do not put Kings and princes to death; they rule through laws. If that is so, why has King Thebaw never been brought to trial? Where are these laws that we hear of? Is it a crime to defend your country against an invader? Would the English not do the same? (*GP*, 150)

Truly, racism as Stuart Hall conceives it, works more like Freud's dreamwork than anything else. It "expresses itself through displacement, through denial, through the capacity to say [...] two contradictory things at the same time, the surface imagery speaking of an unspeakable content, the repressed content of a culture" ("Race, culture and communications", 15). With her seething rhetorical-political gestures, the Queen challenges the silencing propensities of the colonialist representations and writes back against the empire.

Resistance at the political level contrasts with reconciliation at the cultural level. The recluse Thebaw's surveillance of the town with his binoculars from the vantage point of his balcony evokes keen interest among the people. It initiates "the legend of Ratnagiri's watchful king" (*GP*, 78) and Thebaw becomes Ratnagiri's "guardian spirit" (*GP*, 80). Certainly not gregarious, Supayalat generously stands by the townsfolk when Ratnagiri is devastated by an outbreak of plague. She allows them to temporarily reside around the walls of the compound to be safe from the contagion. She has her vested self-interest in her action, but the scourge of Rangoon is deified at Ratnagiri: "overnight she became

a guardian goddess, a protector of the unfortunate, an incarnate *devi* who had rescued hundreds from the ravages of the plague" (*GP*, 83). While the King and the Queen remain confined within Outram House, their daughters peregrinate around Ratnagiri and try to develop an Indo-Burmese hybrid identity. In their early years in colonial India, the Princesses usually dressed in Burmese clothes, but with the passage of time they foster a cultural assimilation:

> One day, no one quite remembered when, they appeared in saris — not expensive or sumptuous saris, but the simple green and red cottons of the district. They began to wear their hair braided and oiled like Ratnagiri schoolgirls; they learned to speak Marathi and Hindustani as fluently as any of the townsfolk — it was only with their parents that they now speak Burmese. (*GP*, 77)

The concept of culture as primeval, separate and distinct melts in the context of migration. Thus cosmopolitanism or multiculturalism militates against narrow, rigid, nationalism and supremacism.

While British colonial expansionism seizes the political powers of Burma and annexes it into its Indian empire, it also opens up wonderful private opportunities for native entrepreneurs. The narrative traces the dynamics of collaboration and complicity of these local capitalists and their meticulous rise. It is their ability to absorb the colonial worldview and internalize the logic of capitalism that shapes the lives of Saya John and Rajkumar and explains their success. Saya John Martins, a Christian Chinese contractor who penitently visits the church after every night that he spends at Ma Cho's bedroom, prefigures Rajkumar. An orphan and a foundling like Rajkumar, Saya John the world traveller knows many languages but doesn't "'belong anywhere'". The Indian soldiers in Singapore emphasize the rootlessness of Saya John by pejoratively calling him "'a *dhobi ka kutta* — a washerman's dog — *na ghar ka na ghat ka* — you don't belong anywhere, either by the water or on land'" (*GP*, 10). Exposure to various cultures since his childhood enables Saya John to develop a hybrid, cross-fertilized identity. On his visit to a European company official Saya John would don a European costume in a manner of role-playing. The English official would scoff at the performance of this colonialised mimic man and try to dismiss "Johnny Chinaman" trying to acquire English culture "in his ill-fitting European clothes, his portliness accentuated by the patched dark trousers that hung in thick folds around his ankles, with his scuffed sola topee perched precariously on his

head" (*GP*, 72). Invariably, Saya John begins his business trips in the interiors of Burmese teak forests dressed as a colonial adventurer "in European clothes: a sola topee, leather boots, khaki trousers" (*GP*, 67). After this ritual, he is forced to "shed an article of clothing" (*GP*, 68) and switch to his indigenous garments because of leeches and insect bites. Sagacious and practical, Saya John realizes that his success depends on understanding the rules of the colonial structure and playing the role of a colonial lackey. He never loses his patience even when snubbed by a European officer. He appreciatively comprehends how the British capital-intensive economy transforms the forest wealth into a commodity:

> [...] until the Europeans came none of them had ever thought of using elephants for the purposes of logging. Their elephants were used only in pagodas and palaces, for wars and ceremonies. It was the Europeans who saw that tame elephants could be made to work for human profit. It was they who invented everything we see around us in the logging camp. This entire way of life is their creation. (*GP*, 74)

The vital lesson that Saya John learns from his colonial masters and which he passes on to Rajkumar is to "bend the work of nature to your will; to make the trees of the earth useful to human beings" (*GP*, 75). Intensive development of timber industry couples with exhaustion of natural resources, as if nature itself is colonized. The narrative evocatively personifies trees which are "killed", "assassinated", "dead" (*GP*, 69) in the name of development. The paradoxical nature of teak trade is emphasized by the narrator when he wonders that "a tree that had felled dynasties, caused inventions, created fortunes, brought a new way of life into being" (*GP*, 71). This Janus-faced nature of teak parallels the dialectical nature of the history of cotton as enunciated in *The Circle of Reason*: "It is a gory history in parts; a story of greed and destruction. Every scrap of cloth is stained by a bloody past. But it is the only history we have and history is hope as well as despair" (57-58). Moulded by Saya John and utilizing his business acumen to the fullest, the tenacious Rajkumar tries to make wonderful use of the opportunities in front of him and embarks on his journey to the pinnacle of prosperity.

Rootless from his infancy, Rajkumar learns his lessons the hard way. Hailing from Chittagong, his father settles in the principal port of the Arakan, Akyab, a site of intercultural discord "where Burma and Bengal collide in a whirlpool of unease" (*GP*, 13). An outbreak of fever tragically disperses the

family. En route to Chittagong, Rajkumar's mother succumbs to this epidemic whispering in his ears "'[l]ive, my Prince; hold on to your life'" (*GP*, 14) which he does successfully throughout his career. After a brief stint as an apprentice in a boat, Rajkumar joins Ma Cho's food-stall in Mandalay as an errand boy. Resolute as he is, Rajkumar withstands racial abuse from his employer nonchalantly — "'you fool of an Indian, you coal-black Kalaa'" (*GP*, 7). Interestingly, Ma Cho also initiates Rajkumar's sexuality and arouses his physical sensibility.

When the royal family is dethroned and the common people loot the palace, a completely different world opens up for Rajkumar. As he enters the forbidden palace compound, he beholds Dolly, one of Queen Supayalat's maids, "the most beautiful creature he had ever beheld, of a loveliness beyond imagining" (*GP*, 34). Most certainly, Rajkumar falls in love at first sight with Dolly elucidating Schopenhauer's observations on the matter: "The spirit of the species alone is able to see at a glance what value she has for *it*, for its ends. As a rule, great passions arise at the first glance" (551). The spellbound Rajkumar next meets Dollly when she is accompanying the Royal Family to India in a procession on foot. It is the last time that he would see her in many years. Paradoxically, the very people who ransacked the Royal palace the night before now mourn the exile of the King. That there exist disinterested invisible bonds between individuals completely unrelated to one another puzzle him:

> He was, in a way, a feral creature, unaware that in certain places there exist invisible bonds linking people to one another through personifications of their commonality. [...] That there should exist a universe of loyalties that was unrelated to himself and his own immediate needs — this was very nearly incomprehensible. (*GP*, 47)

The ties that bind human beings transcend all segregating boundaries.

Unfortunately, however, Rajkumar faces just the obverse. The enormous presence of Indian soldiers in the victorious British army enrages the Burmese people. Their wrath falls on the innocent Rajkumar as they single him out to answer for the soldiers' presence. Saya John's timely intervention saves Rajkumar's plight. The worldly-wise Saya discerns "something unusual", "a kind of watchful determination" in the boy: "No excess of gratitude here, no gifts or offerings, no talk of honour, with murder in the heart. There was no simplicity in his face, no innocence: his eyes were filled with worldliness, curiosity, hunger. That was as it should be" (*GP*, 30). The "curious and predatory" (*GP*, 58)

Rajkumar joins Saya John's company and embarks on a new phase in his life. Industrious and skilful, Rajkumar quickly learns the tricks of teak trade. What is more, by being able to slip into his own Chittagong dialect with the raftsmen gives him immense pleasure. Fuelled by his profound ambition, Rajkumar, who equates nature with capital, now begins human trade by transporting indentured labourers from South India to Burma. For the economically powerful Rajkumar these labourers are nothing more than commodities. With his accumulated savings and a bit of financial assistance from Saya John, Rajkumar establishes a profitable teak plantation. A crafty negotiator, Rajkumar secures a lucrative contract with a railway company. He is now a transformed man as he methodically prepares for his crucial business meeting. His graduation from "green longyi and scuffed pinni vest" into a "suit [...] appropriately plain and black, and his tie neatly tied, the collar turned to just the right angle" (*GP*, 131) signifies his evolution from a boat-apprentice to a well-to-do timber merchant. In his meticulous disposition Saya John does not recognize him as an orphan, "an abandoned kalaa, a rags-clad Indian who had strayed too far from home" but as "a reinvented being, formidably imposing and of commanding presence" (*GP*, 132). Now it is Rajkumar's turn to assert to his mentor that if "'I'm ever going to make this business grow, I'll have to take a few risks'" (*GP*, 130). The confident Rajkumar is an epitome of economic individualism.

An orphan like Rajkumar, Dolly's is the story of an exile the trajectory of which is determined by the logic of broader historical events. One of Queen Supayalat's personal attendants, Dolly looked after the Second Princess. Without any family and other means of support, Dolly has no option but to accompany the Royal Family in their exile to India. She arouses Rajkumar's indignation by offering the sweets that he has given her to the foreign soldier marching beside her. But, as Rajkumar gradually realizes, that is precisely what she should do to survive as a rootless migrant in an alien land:

> "Dolly was doing exactly what had to be done. What purpose would it serve for these girls to make a futile show of resentment? How could they succeed in defiance when the very army of the realm had succumbed? No, better by far to wait, and in the meanwhile to smile. This way Dolly would live." (*GP*, 46)

In India, while the other maids begin resisting the authority of the Queen, Dolly's integrity is unquestionable. Gradually, while all the other Burmese attendants

slowly desert the Royal Family, Dolly, "as beautiful as a fairytale princess" (*GP*, 77) stays with them. Intertwining her life with the Royal Family, Dolly becomes the pivot on which their life moves. Compassionate and of greater understanding, she controls the domestic chores with astute managerial skills. Enduring the pains of exile within the palace compound of Ratnagiri, Dolly's biological relationship with the coachman, Mohan Sawant, comes as a bliss subverting all national and racial demarcations. Unfortunately for Dolly, the First Princess herself falls in love with the coachmen and their blooming passion is thwarted.

Uma Dey, the Collector's wife, is the kindred spirit with whom Dolly shares a sympathetic relationship. It is to this sensitive woman that Dolly reveals the pangs of her rootless existence which belongs nowhere: "'If I went to Burma now I would be a foreigner — they would call me a kalaa like they do to Indians — a trespasser, an outsider from across the sea'" (*GP*, 113). Migration alters Dolly's conception of her homeland which exists primarily in the mind. Although Burma retains an emotional influence over her life, it exists in a fractured, discontinuous relationship with her present: "'I don't remember much, which is a kind of mercy, I suppose. I see it in patches sometimes. It's like a scribble on a wall — no matter how many times you paint over it, a bit of it always comes through, but not enough to put together the whole'" (*GP*, 113). Dolly's fragmentary and fissured mental reconstruction echoes Rushdie's recollections of home in "broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 11). Nowhere to go, Dolly equates home with her present physical location: "'This is the only place I know. This is home'" (*GP*, 119). What she vividly remembers about her past in Mandalay is the Glass Palace where "'[e]verything [...] was of crystal and gold. You could see yourself everywhere if you lay on the floor'" (*GP*, 112). In spite of her displacement, her commitment to the Royal Family remains as firm as ever. When, fuelled by the colonial ideas of liberty and progress, Uma questions Dolly about the bloodthirsty past of Queen Supayalat, Dolly calmly but patriotically retorts: "'don't you sometimes wonder how many people have been killed in queen Victoria's name? It must be millions, wouldn't you say? I think I'd be frightened to live with one of those pictures'" (*GP*, 114). Celebrating human emotions that connect people, Dolly rubbishes Uma's skepticism about the differences in caste as an obstacle in Mohan Sawant's marriage with the First Princess: "'Oh, you Indians [...]. You're all the same, all obsessed with your

castes and your arranged marriages. In Burma when a woman likes a man, she is free to do what she wants'" (*GP*, 118). As for the coachman and the Princess, "'they're just a man and a woman who've spent years together, living behind the same walls'" (*GP*, 118). Going a step further, she humanistically dissolves all boundaries between the self and the other and feels that the child in the First Princess's womb is her own: "'all I can think of now is the birth of my child'" (*GP*, 162). Having led a life of confinement, both in Mandalay and in Ratnagiri, Dolly reposes her reality exclusively in her mind. Her self-identification with the child is one way of compensating for her thwarted love life with Mohan Sawant. Her vicarism sharpens her capacity for empathy.

An odd mixture of a capitalist and a romantic lover, Rajkumar, now an established man of the world, sets sail for Ratnagiri in Dolly's pursuit. While Dolly has assimilated herself into Indian culture and can speak Konkani language very fluently, the same is true for Rajkumar. Uma's uncle in Burma, D.P. Roy, writes to her about "Rajkumar-babu" who "he has lived in Burma so long that he is more Burmese than Indian and may well be counted as a foreigner" (*GP*, 135). Interestingly, while Rajkumar relates at ease with Burmese lifestyle, he resists Westernization. In stark contrast to the Anglicized Collector, his table manners reveal his profound sense of unease: "Even now, after two years of dinners and parties, he found it hard to cope with this atmosphere of constrained enactment" (*GP*, 141). Anyway, Rajkumar recounts his first meeting with Dolly in unambiguous terms. For the nonplussed young boy, she was "'beautiful beyond belief, beyond comprehension. She was like the palace itself, a thing of glass, inside which you could see everything of which your imagination was capable'" (*GP*, 144). The introspective Dolly, however, refuses Rajkumar's proposal because she views her past to be discontinuous with her present: "'It wasn't me you saw. It was someone else [...] I have no memory of what you describe. [...] I don't know. It wasn't me. I was not there'" (*GP*, 147). The unrelenting Dolly considers Rajkumar's love for her unreal and believes that he is seduced by his memory: "'He's in love with what he remembers. That isn't me'" (*GP*, 161). Moreover, she has so intimately tied herself up with the Royal Family that "'this is my home and I have no other'" (*GP*, 148). It is Uma who sees in Rajkumar Dolly's rescuer from her gaol at Outram House. Trusting the genuineness of his affections, she presses Dolly to concede to him. Convinced by her unconscious

dream of Rajkumar, Dolly accepts him as her man. They garland each other "smiling like children" (*GP*, 169) and recognize the bliss of their mutual love.

The loving pair of Rajkumar and Dolly is counter pointed by the loveless couple of the Collector B.P. Dey and Uma. An intermediary between the British Empire and the Burmese Royal Family, the Collector is the typical educated colonial subject that Macaulay envisaged: "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (430). Colonialism wins its great victories not only because of its military and technological prowess but also because of its cultural appropriation. It creates secular hierarchies incompatible with the traditional order. By passing colonialism off as a civilizing mission, the colonizers dupe the colonized. Carrying a certain cultural baggage, the colonial system perpetuates itself by inducing the colonized to accept new social norms and cognitive categories. Unnoticed and hence unchallenged, these are instruments of oppression and dominance. Under the cloak of a civilizing mission, the colonial system persuades the colonized to internalize its logic and absorb its values. By responding to the fresh opportunities provided by the colonizer, the colonized actively participates in his own oppression, thereby, corroding his own self. The colonized is thus a participant in a "moral and cognitive venture against oppression" (Nandy, xiv). By making choices, he becomes a self-destructive co-victim. This is "the intimate enemy" position — that which moulds one's interiority also corrodes him from within, resulting in the loss of his self. "This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all"(Nandy, xi). The inevitable result is the thorough Westernization and modernization of the colonized. The Collector's complete absorption of the civilizing mission of the colonialist ideology is epitomized by his "finely-cut Saville Row suits" (*GP*, 104) and his nostalgic recollections of the "cobbled streets and stone bridges, [...] concerts he'd attended" (*GP*, 159) at Cambridge. An Anglophile, he minutely scrutinizes that everything is in order at the dinner table. The ideology of the British Raj percolates deep into his private life as well. To get along well with his European colleagues he "needed a girl who would be willing to step out into society; someone young, who wouldn't be resistant to learning modern ways"(*GP*, 158). The relationship between the husband and the wife is not based on an overmastering emotion but on egoism and role-playing. It

is the Collector's personal anxiety to emerge as an "authentic" British through mimicry. Furthermore, the domineering husband tries to mould his wife in terms of himself. As the widowed Uma ponders:

> He had wielded immense power as a District Collector, yet paradoxically, the position had brought him nothing but unease and uncertainty; she recalled the nervous, ironic way in which he had played the part of Collector; she remembered how he'd watched over her at table, the intolerable minuteness of his supervision, the effort he had invested in moulding her into a reflection of what he himself aspired to be. There seemed never to be a moment when he was not haunted by the fear of being thought lacking by his British colleagues. (*GP*, 186)

Uma's proximity with Dolly further widens this cleavage. The knowledge of the First Princess's pregnancy coupled with his realization that Uma kept it as a closely-guarded secret from him creates in the Collector a profound sense of betrayal. The Collector's dream of an ideal, modern conjugal life is shattered: "'To live with a woman as an equal, in spirit and intellect: this seemed to me the most wonderful thing life could offer. To discover together the world of literature, art: what could be richer, more fulfilling? But what I dreamt of is not yet possible, not here, in India, not for us'" (*GP*, 172). A champion of feminine autonomy, the spirited Uma is unable to accept the Collector's Cambridge philosophy "to bargain for a woman's soul with the coin of kindness and patience" (*GP*, 153). For her this extinction of self is "beyond decency, beyond her imagining. [...] Anything would be better than to submit" (*GP*, 153). Hence, although B.P. Dey has been "nothing but kind and patient" and Uma has "nothing to complain of" (*GP*, 172), she decides to part her ways with her husband to realize her own individual identity. "To be left for a mere idea is an unpardonable humiliation"(Mander and Mitchenson, 261). Uma's decision to leave comes precisely at the moment when the Collector's tenure at Ratnagiri is suddenly terminated by the colonial government. Unable to accept this double blow the Collector tragically drowns himself in the sea. The nonchalant Queen who bitterly rams home to him his fragile and tenuous identity — "'Collector-sahib, Sawant is less a servant than you. At least he has no delusions about his place in the world'" (*GP*, 150) — commemorates her gaoler's death by spitting into the garden. Holding a contradictory "in-between" position, the Collector has been completely mesmerized by the empty rhetoric of the European high ideals of Progress and

Liberty to the point of no return. A split-self, the Collector's ambivalence leads to his ruin.

Liberated from the bond of marriage, the self-possessed Uma's brief sojourn to Rangoon opens up an entirely new world for her. In a neat reversal of the situation, she unfavourably contrasts her own circumstances with Dolly's "ebullient happiness" (*GP*, 185) in marriage. She vitally realizes that while her relationship with her late husband was dictated by decorum, "by clearly defined rules and meanings" (*GP*, 186), Dolly's pliability strengthened her ties with Rajkumar in spite of their unequal preferences and habits. It is after his death that Uma recognizes that the talented Collector was born at the wrong place in the wrong time: "he indeed had been a good man, an honest man — a man of great intelligence and ability who happened to have been born into a circumstance that could not offer him an appropriate avenue for the fulfillment of his talents" (*GP*, 186). Showing strong disregard for her husband's conformity to the "incomprehensible rules" (*GP*, 187) of the Empire, Uma appreciates the unassuming outlook of Dolly "a woman who had no illusions about the nature of her condition; a prisoner who knew the exact dimensions of her cage and could look for contentment within those confines" (*GP*, 187). Uma revels in transcending the imposed boundaries on women. Strangely, although she had opposed her husband's Anglophilia, "some part of her was irretrievably the Collector's creation, and if nothing was to be served by mourning this disfigurement, then it was her duty to turn her abilities to the task of seeking a remedy" (*GP*, 187). Hence, she sets sail for Europe for the fullest possible self-realization. Although the Collector has been a collaborator with the colonial government, he was not unaware of the racist ideology of the British: "the smell of miscegenation has alarmed them as nothing else could have: they are tolerant in many things, but not this. They like to keep their races tidily separate" (*GP*, 173). It is Uma who braces herself up to raise her voice against the colonial government by joining nationalist politics overseas. The strong influence of Dolly in Uma's life has much to do with the widowed Uma's decision. She acknowledges to Dolly in Ratnagiri that she "'was just a girl before I met you. You've shown me what courage is, what human beings can endure'" (*GP*, 163). Her experience of racism and exploitation abroad turns her into a revolutionary. Like Lala Hardayal, one of her most brilliant nationalists for whom India was a "a vast garrison" (*GP*, 221),

Uma recognizes that "the conditions being created in their homeland were such as to ensure that their descendants would enter the new epoch as cripples, lacking the most fundamental means of survival" (*GP*, 222). The end result, as she foresees, would be that "they would truly become in the future what they had never been in the past, a burden upon the world" (*GP*, 222). She therefore endeavours to "change the angle of their country's entry into the future" (*GP*, 222). The xenophobia of the Americans and the Canadians converted numerous Sikh immigrants, the "former loyalists" into "revolutionaries" and "dedicated enemies of the Empire they had once served" (*GP*, 222). Inspired by the Irish model of resistance these disillusioned victims gradually formed the Indian Independence League which Uma joins. Uma and the League disregard the political views of Mahatma Gandhi because he "heads the loyal opposition" and has "chosen to deal with the Empire's velvet glove instead of striking at its iron fist" (*GP*, 223). Moulded by the ideological network of the colonial masters, instead of striking against it, the Indian army has further consolidated the Empire. What is more by recruiting a few selected castes of men the empire has perpetrated divisions even within the ranks of the army. Uma's primary goal is to enlighten the soldiers about duplicitous colonialism. An influential leader of the League, Giani Amreek Singh, confesses to Uma how they as soldiers were duped by the false consciousness, how they lived as victims of the ruler's ideology:

> We never thought that we were being used to conquer people. Not at all: we thought the opposite. We were told that we were freeing those people. That is what they said — that we were going to set those people free from their bad kings or their evil customs or some such thing. We believed it because they believed it too. It took us a long time to understand that in their eyes freedom exists wherever *they* rule. (*GP*, 224)

Thus by gaining an insight into the Indian national identity Uma begins her emancipatory project of anticolonial nationalism.

Rajkumar and Dolly experience a happy homecoming. Since timber is a thing of the past, Saya John and Rajkumar establish a rubber plantation on Penang Island. Rajkumar's return coincides with the return of Saya's son Matthew and his wife Elsa. A New York based Protestant, Elsa Christens the rubber plantation as Morningside Rubber Estate. Rajkumar and Dolly's first son Neel resembles his father, their second Dinu is akin to Dolly temperamentally. Coincidentally, Matthew and Elsa have their first child, a daughter named

Alison. Later, a boy named Timmy is born to them. Years later when Uma sees these four siblings grow up together and laments her own childlessness, she reflects on how "the canvas of a lifetime's connections [...] acquired the patina of another generation": "she could see inscribed the history of her friendships and the lives of her friends — the stories and trajectories that had brought Elsa's life into conjunction with Matthew's, Dolly's with Rajkumar's, Malacca with New York, Burma with India" (*GP*, 225). Truly, these intertwining family histories transcend the rigidity of national boundaries. While Uma plunges herself into mainstream politics and Rajkumar and Matthew immerse themselves in war time profiteering, Dolly gradually withdraws herself from the external world. Thebaw appeared to Dolly in a strange dream and instructed her to rush the feverish Dinu to the hospital. It is diagnosed that Dinu has polio and any further delay would have spelt disaster for him. It is in the hospital that Dolly learns about Thebaw's death in India. It seems that he died just a few hours before Dolly's dream. Colin Wilson terms this type of prophetic dream in which the subconscious mind wells up "controlled hallucination"(476). The days in the tranquil hospital atmosphere transform her psyche. Lying in bed with her convalescing son, the introspective Dolly sympathetically listens to other mothers crying over their dead children:

> [...] the murmurs of anxious relatives; distant screams of pain; women keening in bereavement. It was as though the walls turned porous in the stillness of the night, flooding her room with an unseen tide of defeat and suffering. The more she listened to those voices, the more directly they spoke to her, sometimes in tones that seemed to recall the past, sometimes in notes of warning. (*GP*, 210)

With her compassion, Dolly transcends the principle of individuation, the creator and sustainer of selfhood, and pierces through the veil of phenomenality. It is to realize one's identity first with the absolute and then through the absolute with the others. The result is the renunciation of the self-centred ego and identification with the entire world with all its weal and woe. Inspired by Thebaw, Dolly yearns for self-transcendence:

> She remembered a word he'd often used, *karuna* — one of the Buddha's words, Pali for compassion, for the immanence of all living things in each other, for the attraction of life for its likeness. A time will come, he had said to the girls, when you too will discover what this word karuna means, and from that moment on, your lives will never again be the same. (*GP*, 211)

This precisely is the conviction of Schopenhauer as well: "Envy more firmly builds up the wall between You and I", and so breeds egoism. 'Sympathy' can so completely demolish that wall that "the distinction between I and not-I vanishes" (240). Having gained this profound insight, the quiet Dolly turns into a recluse.

While Dolly is a lonely denizen of a self-enclosed world — "shut behind a glass wall" (*GP*, 209), her soul-mate Uma tries to grapple with the variety of new experiences that fall on her way. Rajkumar and Matthew are pseudo-colonizers in themselves, commodifying and transforming the natural wealth of Burma and Malaya. They defend their transportation of indentured Tamil labourers by promoting a false ideology that true progress lies in improving the economic status of these people. Rajkumar's greed for money couples with his lust. He ruthlessly exploits these helpless women labourers and even fathers a son named Ilongo. As a token of atonement he financially supports his illegitimate son and his mother but never displays any feeling of guilt. But already seeds of discontent have crept in and interestingly it is nature itself which is leading the resistance. Matthew flaunts his "little empire" to Uma but also documents the resistance of the apparently serene plantation itself:

> There's law, there's order, everything is well run. Looking at it, you think everything here is tame, domesticated, that all the parts have been filled carefully together. But it's when you try to make the whole machine work that you discover that every bit of it is fighting back. It has nothing to do with me or with rights and wrongs: I could make this the best-run little kingdom in the world and it would still fight back. (*GP*, 233)

Interestingly, disregarding the advice of scientific experts, Matthew endorses the plantation coolies' firm conviction that some trees do not produce rubber because they are fighting back on their own behalf since "'every rubber tree in Malaya was paid for with an Indian life'" (*GP*, 233). Not surprisingly, this huge expropriation of Burmese wealth by Indian businessmen and moneylenders who "live like colonialists, lording it over the Burmese" (*GP*, 240) infuriates the Burmese and precipitates a riot between these two nationals. The celebration of ego-ideal in the formation of national identities creates a rupture and the Burmese Self targets the Indian Other. Amidst this tension, Uma is placed in a similar situation as May in *The Shadow Lines* — an Indian rickshaw-puller is slaughtered by an enraged Burmese mob. When she instinctively tries to descend from her car to protect the helpless victim, Dolly, anticipating danger for Uma, restrains her to be involved in

the situation. The Burmese rebellion is steered by a leader named Saya San who aims to avenge the capture of King Thebaw. For Uma the Burmese struggle for independence is a mirror-image of the Indian uprising of 1857. As anticipated, a company of Indian troops is sent to Burma to decimate the insurgents: "once again, Indian soldiers were being used to fortify the Empire" (*GP*, 247). Ironically, "[n]obody in India seemed to know of these events; no one seemed to care" (*GP*, 247). To make matters worse for Uma and her nationalist movements, Rajkumar supports the colonial government's crushing of the Burmese insurgency because "'it's not just the Empire those soldiers are protecting, it's also Dolly and me'" (*GP*, 247). The late Collector's judicious observation that "'if it were not for the British, the Burmese would probably have risen up against these Indian businessmen and driven them out like sheep'" (*GP*, 136) ultimately comes true. But Uma is dead against any complicity in the colonizing mission and attacks Rajkumar as a neo-colonialist collaborator before leaving Burma: "'It's people like you who're responsible for this tragedy. Did you ever think of the consequences when you were transporting people here? What you and your kind have done is far worse than the worst deeds of the Europeans'" (*GP*, 247). Back in India trying to wake from the "terrible dream" (*GP*, 252) of her Burmese experiences, Uma realizes that the unorganized, technologically inferior anti-colonial uprisings are no match for the overwhelming power of a well-organized and thoroughly modernized British army. Gandhian philosophy is decades ahead of the romantic, rebellious ideas that she cherished. In a complete switch of mind, she embraces the ideals that she has always disregarded: "the movement against colonialism was an uprising of unarmed Indians against those who bore arms — both Indians and British — and that its chosen instruments were the weapons of the weaponless, its very weakness its source of strength" (*GP*, 254).

While Uma veers from her rebellious ways of politics to the Gandhian method of passive resistance, her nephew Arjun evolves from a loyal colonial subject to a rebel soldier. Like the Collector B.P. Dey who prefigures him, Arjun idealises the coveted position he holds in colonial service and is proud pf the honours that his regiment — *The Royal Battalion* — has been conferred with in the past. For him, soldiering is a profession associated with power without any social and ethical compulsions. Since the all-encompassing Indian army dissolves all regional and religious differences between the soldiers, the self-aggrandizing

Arjun boasts to the unassuming Dinu that they are the "'First True Indians'" (*GP*, 278). He takes immense pride in the fact that he lives with the Europeans on equal terms and is an elite:

> [...] we're the first modern Indians; the first Indians to be truly free. We eat what we like, we drink what we like, we're the first Indians who're not weighed down by the past. [...] We're the ones who actually live with Westerners [...] We know how the minds of Westerners work. Only when every Indian is like us will the country become truly modern. (*GP*, 279-280)

Arjun, like the Collector before him, is a colonial mimic man occupying a hybrid cultural space. For the psychologically colonized Arjun, the British stand for the epitome of civilization, but the perceptive Dinu pierces through the façade of Arjun and his colleagues in the "fantastic bestiary of their table-talk": "their assessments were so exaggerated that they seemed to be inventing versions of themselves for collective consumption" (*GP*, 278). Like the Collector, Arjun too is not unaware of the racism that pervades the colonial Indian army. The British Indian army stands on the edifice that "'there was to be a separation between Indians and Britishers'": "'On the surface everything in the army appears to be ruled by manuals, regulations, procedures: it seems very cut and dried. But actually, underneath there are all these murky shadows that you can never quite see: prejudice, distrust, suspicion'" (*GP*, 284-285). But in spite of this vital realization, Arjun's loyalty to the institution remains unshaken and he unquestioningly admires the superiority of the British.

Unlike the self-alienated Arjun, his colleague Hardayal alias Hardy has no inhibitions whatsoever about the duplicitous nature of the colonial institution. Thoroughly aware of an Indian soldier's subordinate position in an army functioning on racism he interrogates the divisions which have remained unquestioned. Reminding Arjun about the inscription at the Military Academy in Dehra Dun — "*The safety, honour and welfare of your country come first, always and every time. The honour, welfare and comfort of the men you command come next...*" — he unravels their unenviable double allegiance and the schizophrenic division within:

> '[...] this country whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time — what is it? Where is this country? The fact is that you and I don't have a country — so where is this place whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time? And why was it that when

> we took our oath it wasn't to a country but to the King Emperor — to defend the Empire?' (*GP*, 330)

Such is the extent of the corrosive nature of colonial ideology that they — the mere pawns in the hands of an ever-expanding Empire — have been robbed of their convictions and are mere mercenaries whose "'hands obey someone else's head; those two parts of his body have no connection with each other'" (*GP*, 347). This is the "intimate enemy" position which reduces a colonized subject to a mere automaton. Gradually awakening to a new reality, the pride Arjun felt as a well-placed officer in the Indian army begins to evaporate. The "stories" of Colonel Buckland about "the mutual loyalties of Indian soldier and English officer ...that ... could be understood only as a kind of love" (*GP*, 332) seems to Arjun an Orientalist representation which he contests: "It seemed that in these stories 'the men' figured only as abstractions, a faceless collectivity imprisoned in a permanent childhood — moody, unpredictable, fantastically brave, desperately loyal, prone to extraordinary excesses of emotion" (*GP*, 332). The "powerful and ...inexplicable" love which the European Colonel speaks of seems to be epitomized in a lowly placed, Indian batman intimately associated with Arjun. What Kishan Singh is to Arjun, Arjun is to the British Officer, accepting subjugation unquestioningly: "Kishan Singh, in his very individuality, had become more than himself — a village, a country, a history, a mirror for Arjun to see refractions of himself" (*GP*, 332). In his selfless service to his master Kishan Singh is akin to Mohan Sawant.

The narrative charts the impact of broad historical events, especially the upheavals engineered by the Second World War, on individual lives. While the great European nations are engaged in a global war, Rajkumar, suffering from pneumonia, is admitted in the same hospital room which coincidentally Dolly and Dinu occupied decades back. Interestingly, "[t]wenty-four years before, at the time of Dolly's stay in that room, Europe had been convulsed by another war" (*GP*, 308). In a rare tranquil moment in a life full of peregrinations, Rajkumar slowly comes to terms with his dislocated identity and declining fortunes. Assessing the situation he asserts to Dolly that another displacement is imminent:

> 'My father was from Chittagong and he ended up in the Arakan; I ended up in Rangoon; you went from Mandalay to Ratnagiri and now you're here too. Why should we expect that we're going to spend the rest of our lives here? [...] Rather

> than be swept along by events, we should make plans anfd take control of our own fate.' (*GP*, 310)

An astute calculator that he is, Rajkumar, to revive his sagging finances, sells all his assets to build a stockpile of timber in a single plantation. He anticipates that the British and the Dutch will need timber to reinforce their armaments in the East. But tragedy strikes twice to ruin him. Matthew and Elsa get killed in a car crash in the Cameron Highlands. A Japaneese bomb in Rangoon scatters the elephants in Rajkumar's plantation in panic. In the resulting melee, the trees are destroyed, Neel is crushed to death, Rajkumar is distraught personally and financially. Having no other option the family decides to join the thirty thousand refugees in the Long March from Burma to India. Despair forces Manju, Neel's widow, to drown herself in the river en route to India. Rajkumar and Dolly stay in Uma's flat for a few years. Finally, Dolly travels to Rangoon in quest for the missing Dinu from where she never returns. Successful in her mission, she spends her last days in the nunnery at Sagaing. While Dolly led a cloistered life in her "homeland", Rajkumar was very much attached to his orphaned grand-daughter Jaya. He recounts to her the stories of his past, personal reminiscences occluded from historical records: "And then Rajkumar would start at the beginning, going back to that day more than sixty years before, when he had heard the sound of English cannon rolling in across the plain to the walls of Mandalay's fort" (*GP*, 485). The rootless Rajkumar tries to gather the memories "of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present" (Bhabha, 139).

While Rajkumar comes to terms with his diasporic self, Arjun grapples with his false consciousness. It is Hardy who acknowledges to Arjun that so thorough is the penetration of the ideological network of the colonial masters into his psyche that he is "just a tool, an instrument" in their hands with the connection between the mind and the body severed:

> '[...] knowing that you had to fight and knowing at the same time that it wasn't really your fight — knowing that whether you won or lost, neither the blame nor the credit would be yours. Knowing that you're risking everything to defend a way of life that pushes you to the sidelines. It's almost as if you're fighting against yourself.' (*GP*, 406)

It is Alison who enlightens Arjun about his fragility: "'you're not in charge of what you do; you're a toy, a manufactured thing, a weapon in someone else's

hands. Your mind doesn't inhabit your body'" (*GP*, 376). Kishan Singh's self-less service to Arjun makes him introspective about their subordination. Kishan Singh's family has served the British army for generations unquestioningly because of the fear injected into their minds during the Mutiny by the brutal killing of the rebel soldiers: "a terror that made you remould yourself, that made you change your idea of your place in the world — to the point where you lost your awareness of the fear that had formed you" (*GP*, 430). Confronted with his "formlessness", Arjun realizes that he has never acted on his own volition. Ironically, it is the uneducated Kishan Singh who is more aware of the past than Arjun himself. Under Hardy's tutelage — "'This is the first time in our lives that we're trying to make up our own minds — not taking orders'" (*GP*, 438) — Arjun, awakening to his true consciousness, shrugs off his misplaced loyalties to the Empire:

> The old loyalties of India, the ancient ones — they'd been destroyed long ago; the British had built their Empire by effacing them. But the Empire was dead now — he knew this because he had felt it die within himself, where it had held its strongest dominion — and with whom was he now to keep faith? (*GP*, 441)

This disillusionment of the Indian soldiers about the racist policies of the British Indian Army, promising liberty but practicing oppression, is well enunciated by Amitav Ghosh in his essay "India's Untold War of Independence":

> The discovery of invisible barriers and ceilings disillusioned them with their immediate superiors, but it did not make them hostile to Western institutions. Rather, these encounters with racism served to convince them — as they had an entire generation of Westernized Indians — that the British colonial regime was not Western *enough*, not progressive *enough*. (108)

As a colonized subject, Arjun saw himself through the lens of the white European. His decolonized mind liberates him from his vacillations and calls for direct action. It is with this spirit of resistance that he asserts to Dinu: "'We rebelled against an Empire that has shaped everything in our lives; coloured everything in the world as we know it. It is a huge, indelible stain which has tainted all of us. We cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves'" (*GP*, 518). Arjun's disillusionment with the ethos of the British Indian Army couples with his awakening to "the racial mythologies of the old mercenary army"(*GP*, 520). Recruitment to the army was ruled by the old imperial notions of racism which

excluded the Tamils on the ground that "they were racially unfit for soldiering" (*GP*, 520). The Tamil plantation workers in Malaya who voluntarily join the Indian National Army turn out to be stronger and more dedicated than the professional soldiers. These plantation workers have been so ruthlessly exploited by the capital intensive economy of the Britishers to that they are reduced to machines: "having your mind taken away and replaced by a clockwork mechanism" (*GP*, 522). Mechanization of man is a form of dehumanizing slavery. The liberation struggle of the Indian National Army serves as an instrument of cultural resistance for these automata against a racist colonial discourse. Their native country India exists for them not as a reality but as an idea: "India was the shining mountain beyond the horizon, a sacrament of redemption — a metaphor for freedom in the same way that slavery was a metaphor for the plantation" (*GP*, 522). Popular or insurgent nationalism thus reclaims or imagines forms of community and challenges colonial rule giving shape to a collective political identity. Waging a desperate battle for nationalist liberation and also for self-realization, Arjun dies a heroic death in central Burma in the final days of the Second World War. An affirmed nationalist and completely free from self-contradictions, Hardy becomes "a national figure", an "ambassador and high-ranking official of the Indian Government" (*GP*, 480). An embodiment of switched identities, Arjun finds redemption in his glorious death.

Introspective and self-possessed, the stoical and sagacious Dinu has a leftist leaning from his youth. Antipathetic to colonialism unlike Rajkumar, Dinu has absolutely no interest in his father's business. The sudden death of Alison's parents brings Dinu to Morningside to stand by her during her crisis. His sojourn in Morningside not only gives wings to his passion for photography but also kindles his love for Alison. He also comes to know the vital truth that Ilongo is his half-brother. Arjun's exuberance lures Alison temporarily, but she collects herself up to realize that "Dinu was much stronger and resourceful, and she understood that that was why she'd been tempted to be cruel to him; that that was why she had had to take the risk of losing him" (*GP*, 376-377). Enjoying their self-fulfilling love for each other, Dinu and Alison are denizens of a realm miles away from the world torn apart by a global war:

> Nothing else was of any account, not the planes, not the bombs, nothing but this. This was what happiness was — he'd never known it before; this melting away, this exaltation, your

> guts spilling into your head, filling your eyes — your mind transformed into your body, your body instinct with the joy in your mind; this sensation of reality having met its end. (*GP*, 401)

Alison's rejection of Arjun for Dinu manifests her preference for love over instinctive desire. With Arjun "it was as though they were both absent, two strangers, whose bodies were discharging a function" (*GP*, 374). On the contrary, with Dinu "she could apprehend the meaning of what it meant to be fully present — eye, mind and touch united in absolute oneness, each beheld by the other, each beholding" (*GP*, 374). Theodor Reik develops the implied difference in terms of "sex" and "love". "Sex", he contends, "is an instant, a biological need, originating in the organism, bound to the body. It is one of the great desires, like hunger and thirst, conditioned by chemical changes within the organism"(19). Physiological in its origin, sex is undiscriminating and easily satiable. With the body and mind as the double provenance, love is on the contrary highly discriminating and not easily satiable. Thus Reik differentiates between sex and love:

> Sex is a passionate interest in another body; love a passionate interest in another personality, or in his life. Sex does not feel pain if its object is injured, nor joy when it is happy. It is possible to possess another person, in sex, but not in love. In love you cannot possess another person. You can force another person to sexual activity, but not to love. (21)

This culmination of the self-sustaining love between Dinu and Alison in the midst of wartime despair and disillusionment is a bridging together of peripatetic families across national boundaries. Interestingly both of them are of mixed genealogies. The delighted Saya John wonderfully expresses this point: "'Rajkumar's son and Matthew's daughter [...].What could be better? The two of you have joined the families'" (*GP*, 446). In fact, Uma had anticipated their marriage years ago and reflected its prospects as she tried to comprehend "why people arranged marriages for their children: it was a way of shaping the future to the past, of cementing one's ties to one's memories and to one's friends. Dinu and Alison — if only they were better suited to each other; how wonderful it might be, the bringing together of so many stories" (*GP*, 230). For Dinu, the bliss of love combines with his bitter experiences of the grimness of colonial rule which arouses his political consciousness. When the Japanese intrusion seems imminent, Alison, Dinu, Saya John and Ilongo prepare to leave for Singapore. However, they are debarred from boarding the evacuation train on racial grounds as the train is

meant only for Europeans. Ironically, it is the Indian railway officials who enforce the rules of the colonial government and keep the non-Europeans off the train: "'They are the rulers; they are the ones who stand to lose'" (*GP*, 425). In despair, Alison sets off by car with Saya John with Dinu to follow later. Unfortunately, they brush with a group of Japanese soldiers. While the old man is shot immediately, Alison shoots herself after a spirited exchange of fire. Once again the life of an individual is entangled in the mesh of uncontrollable broad historical events. Dinu is one "among the many millions who had vanished into the darkness"(*GP*, 486).

Researching on the history of photography in India and possessing a keen interest in the history of her family, Jaya, Rajkumar's granddaughter, travels to Ratnagiri "the place where her own, very particular, history had its origins" (*GP*, 490). Interestingly, memory keeps the long deceased King Thebaw "vibrantly alive" (*GP*, 491). Back in Calcutta as she goes through her compiled documents on Burma, she chances upon a photograph of Aung San Suu Kyi credited to one U Tun Pe. A discussion with her aunt Bela reveals to her that he is none other than Dinu. It is Bela again who provides Jaya with her next lead, Ilongo Alagappan. Soon Jaya contacts him and travels to Morningside to retrieve Dinu's lost traces. Once again the recurrent motif of academic research as a quest for a fugitive identity in Ghosh's novels comes to the forefront.

While Rajkumar engaged in wartime profiteering, his illegitimate son Ilongo initiates a transformation from capitalism to collectivism after the war is over. Mobilising the plantation workers into a co-operative movement, Ilongo rechristens "Morningside Rubber Estate" as "Morningside Co-operative". His enterprise of economic collectivism propels him into mainstream politics. It is Ilongo who provides the vital information to Jaya that Dinu lived in Rangoon and had created a small photo studio "The Glass Palace".

Dinu's discourse articulates the failures of Burmese nationalism after the assassination of Aung San. A series of insurrections on ethnic grounds have belied the aspirations of the post-colonial nation state. Before long, the old imperial British government finds its legacy in the regressive post-colonial order of the Burmese military regime which "'use the past to justify the present. And they themselves are much worse than the colonialists'" (*GP*, 537). Despite its show of military power and extreme control over both the public and the personal sectors,

the regime does not have the ideological and epistemological depth and power of the British colonial machinery. A new censorship was enforced which restricted the freedom of writers as a result of which Dinu's Burmese wife Ma Thin Thin Aye finds herself languishing in prison. Quuen Supayalat's prophecy about the destitute condition of Burma comes true as Dinu reveals "'you know how poor we are in our Myanmar'" (*GP*, 507). The Burmese junta decides to shut Burma off exclusively from the world outside: "It was because of the imperialists that Burma had to be shut off from the world; the country had to be defended against neo-colonialism and foreign aggression" (*GP*, 537). In his collection of prose pieces *Dancing in Cambodia; At Large in Burma*, Ghosh dismantles the exclusivist ideology of the nation-state "In a region as heterogeneous as South-East Asia, any boundary is sure to be arbitrary. On balance, Burma's best hopes for peace lie in maintaining intact the larger and more inclusive entity that history, albeit absent-mindedly, bequeathed to its population almost half a century ago"(100). It is this notion of compositeness and inclusiveness that Dinu thrusts on his writer wife: "'We are a universe on our own [...]. Look at all our people [...] Karen, Kayah, Kachin, Shan, Rakhine, Wa, Pa-O, Chin, Mon [...]. Wouldn't it be wonderful if your stories could contain each language, each dialect?'" (GP,533). It is this concept of syncretism, of a national reconciliation of all opposing ethnic insurrections that is the liberating idea in a crumbling nation. This ideal is expressed both by Dinu and by the democratic voice of Aung San Suu Kyi who realizes that although "politics has invaded everything, spared nothing [...] religion, art, family", "it cannot be allowed to cannibalize all of life, all of existence" (*GP*, 542). It is this voice of repose that symbolizes the democratic aspirations of the Burmese people against the oppressing menace of the military junta.

After some serious reflections on the anxieties of post-colonial nation formation, the novel has a surprise ending with the rather bizarre union of the two aged pair — Rajkumar and Uma — in bed. It is an unexpected twist given their topsy-turvy relationship. What is more, it introduces to the readers the "author", Jaya's son, as the narrative suddenly changes from a conventional third-person omniscient narrative to a first-person one: "What I saw that morning in my great-great-aunt Uma's bed-room remains to this day the most tender, the most moving sight I have ever seen, and from the day when I sat down to write this book — the

book my mother never wrote — I knew that it was here that it would end" (*GP*, 547). This self-reflexive stance reveals that the novel is an intimate family memoir, a rather subjective recollection of the past and certainly not an official historical document. Judging from Ghosh's literary credo, one can be sure that that is what the novelist meant it to be.

Chapter Seven

Translating Life-Worlds

The Hungry Tide

Myths have a vital meaning. Not merely do they represent, they are the psychic life of the primitive tribe, which immediately falls to pieces and decays when it loses its mythological heritage, like a man who has his soul. A tribe's mythology is its living religion whose loss is always and everywhere, even among the civilized, a moral catastrophe. — C.G. Jung, *The Modern Mind*, 1965

On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light, [...] the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation. A contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times. — Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, 1973

Amitav Ghosh's anticolonial spirit finds its consummate expression in *The Glass Palace*. His next novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) is less ambitious in scope than the epic grandeur of its preceding one. In stark contrast to the diasporic peregrinations that dominate the bulk of Ghosh's oeuvre, the action of *The Hungry Tide* is located in the swampy mangrove forests at the mouth of the Gangetic delta. Contemplating on this marked shift, Ghosh confesses that the novel, intimately related with his family, initiates the return of an expatriate writer: "This is my first book that is completely located and situated in Bengal and it was very important to me for exactly that reason [...] I feel in some mental and emotional way that I'm in a process of returning – which will take me a long, long time – and it is currently underway" (*The Chronicle Interview*, 3). One of the major enterprises in this novel is to synthesize two antithetical life-worlds, in fact his own schizophrenic split: "For myself, even though I'm very much a part of urban India, indeed the urban world, my mind has always been drawn to the marginal, the remote and the rural. So it came as almost a natural thing for me to want to write about these aspects, to see in what ways I could reconcile them" (*The Chronicle Interview*, 5). Indeed, syncretism is Ghosh's literary credo.

The Hungry Tide has had a multifarious critical reception. Emphasizing the intimate nature of Ghosh's most humanistic venture, John C. Hawley contends that "[i]f much of Ghosh's writing mediates on the arbitrary and vexing nature of national borders, this book is surely obsessed with more personal divisions between men and women" (131). Anshuman A. Mondal, on the contrary, chooses to focus on the thoroughly impersonal "government servants and government machinery as a corrupt system of power which seeks knowledge only for the purposes of political control and believes other forms of knowledge to constitute a threat" (66). Some critics bring in different theories of identity to expostulate their thesis. Attempting a comparative study of *The Hungry Tide* and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, Debashree Dattaray believes that the two novels "reveal how 'nation', in the Indian context may be interpreted as a collection of linguistic identities or a composite religious and socio-political identity" (143). Arguing in a similar vein, Nishat Zaidi considers the novel as "yet another addition in Ghosh's project of heteroglossic national identity" (76). Departing from all these contentions Hywel Dix forthrightly terms the novel a "narrative of dispossession" (127). Such diverse literary interpretations of the same novel reveal its intricate nature.

The architectonics of space form a major organizing principle in a narrative. Expatiating on the novel's specialty to interweave the global and the local, Ghosh observes in his essay "The March of the Novel through History" that

> [t]he novel as a form had been vigorously international from the start; [...] And yet, the paradox of the novel as a form is that it is founded upon a myth of parochiality, in the exact sense of a parish – a place and charted, a definite location. A novel [...] must always be set somewhere: it must have a setting, and within the evolution of the narrative this setting must, classically, play a part almost as important as those of the characters themselves. Location is thus intrinsic to a novel. (*II*, 294)

Almost all of Ghosh's preceding novels traverse an extensive geographical terrain. While *The Circle of Reason* spreads across India, the Gulf region and northern Africa, *The Shadow Lines* shifts between London, Dhaka and Kolkata across different temporal divides. While *In An Antique Land* and *The Calcutta Chromosome* interweave the past and the present connecting India and Egypt and India and the United States respectively, The Glass Palace encompasses vast swathes of India, Burma and Malaya. In contrast, *The Hungry Tide* examines the

microcosm of human experience in the wilderness of the archipelago of tiny islands and the labyrinthine waterways of the Sundarbans. Location does not merely serve as the background in *The Hungry Tide* with human subjects in the foreground. Instead, the Sundarbans becomes one of the principal agents in the action and probably the most memorable figure to emerge from the events. This extensive geographical terrain, the novel's chronotope, is the dominant metaphor for porosity of all rigid compartmentalizations. In his perceptive review of the novel, Alok Rai asserts that "in speaking about 'the tide country', Ghosh seems to have found the perfect landscape, one that 'says' almost everything that he has been writing about for so long and with such eloquence" (1). In this remote environment where nature is found red in tooth and claw, all demarcations diffuse:

> 'There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometers inland and every day thousands of acres of forest disappear underwater only to re-emerge hours later. The currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily – some days the water tears away entire promontories and peninsulas; at other times it throws up new shelves and sandbanks where there were none before.' (*The Hungry Tide*, 7)

In this tide country where environment is transformed every moment, nothing is certain and stable. By fusing time-space as an inseparable whole, the novelistic chronotope of the Sundarbans subverts the binaries of culture/nature. Bakhtin describes the artistic chronotope thus: "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into a carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time as it were thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 84). This primal landscape, presented as a colossal and mysterious figure, is Janus-faced. Its richly evocative description as "the trailing threads of India's fabric, the ragged fringe of her sari, the *ākchol* that follows her" (*HT*, 6) is juxtaposed with its destructive aspect: "'At no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrain's utter hostility to their presence, of its cunning and resourcefulness, of its determination to destroy or expel them'" (*HT*, 8). There is no hospitality in the tide country. Ghosh's uncanny waterscape that alternates between being subject and object, victim and victimizer, land and water can never really be "home" because it can never provide stability, security and freedom from fear. It is a space where the perceiver finds himself simultaneously "at home" and "not at home." Further, there is a sense of a primeval secret buried deep in the

earth itself when Nirmal speaks about "how skilful the tide country is in silting over its past" (*HT*, 69, also 229). The Sundarbans is an embodiment of post-structuralist space with a palimpsest of differentiated human and natural activity existing in a state of perpetual tension. An emblem of dynamic space it is an apt illustration of the Foucaldian concept of "heterotopias" which represents "the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our times and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us" ("Of Other Spaces", 23).

The Sundarbans is not simply an isolated remote environment with no substantial interaction with mankind. A site of polysemous layers, it is a zone of contact between multiple cultural, national, and religious communities:

> This is after all no remote and lonely frontier – this is India's doormat, the threshold of a teeming subcontinent. Everyone who has ever taken the eastern route into the Gangetic heartland has had to pass through it – the Arakanese, the Khmer, the Javanese, the Dutch, the Malays, the Chinese, the Portuguese, the English. It is common knowledge that almost every island in the tide country has been inhabited at some time or other. (*HT*, 50)

It is thus a palimpsest of "sedimented layers of socialization, one within the other, one on top of the other, until a complex natural-social landscape occurs" (Murdoch, 1). But such is the all-absorbing nature of this Titanic landscape that it reduces all historical processes and cultural formations into nothingness: "the specialty of mangroves is that they do not merely recolonize land; they erase time. Every generation creates its own population of ghosts" (*HT*, 50). W. R. Greer believes that choosing the Sundarbans as his setting allows Ghosh "to create a setting where everyone is on an even footing [...] the hostile environment erases all social strata because everyone is an equal in the struggle to survive in the hostile environment"(1). The threatening topography of the Sundarbans, elides differences between the First World and the Third World, the local and the global, the rural and the urban, the traditional and the modern, and among linguistic, religious, and class barriers. Nature serves as the agent to level all social and cultural hierarchies.

Human history enmeshes with geographical features to create the image of a total organism, a composite being that conforms to the postulates of post-structuralist new geography's emphasis on "heterogeneous relations" between "natural and social and the human and the non-human" helping "human

geographers to reach across the human-physical divide" (Murdoch, 3). The idealist Nirmal who privileges mind over matter in his contention that "'[a] place is what you make of it'" (*HT*, 283) tries to achieve a microcosm/macrocosm interface in his conception of spatial imagination: "'For him it meant that everything which existed was inter-connected: the trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature. He hunted down facts in the way a magpie collects shiny things. Yet when he strung them all together, somehow they did become stories – of a kind'" (*HT*, 282-283). This inclusiveness is Ghosh's literary credo. Novel/spatial imagination is hence the over-arching phenomenon that embraces the totality of lived experience.

This remote location has an accretion of historical layers that is deeply rooted. For anyone who is easily deceived about the absence of history in this space, Nirmal's contention serves as a perfect reminder: "yet in the tide country, where life was lived on the margins of greater events, it was useful also to be reminded that no place was so remote as to escape the flood of history" (*HT*, 77). That forces of history do have an impact on the wilderness is cogently expressed by the novelist himself:

> [...] you don't expect to encounter history in a place like that. The strange thing is that when you look at any place closely, you discover that a place that seems empty of history is actually deep layered. It is like an onion; you can just keep peeling layers and never come to a core; there is always more. This proved to be exactly the case with the Sundarbans: there was layer upon layer of things to be seen and heard. (*The Chronicle Interview*, 2)

The narrative interweaves oral cultures of myth/folklore with written historical records. Exploring the history of the place, Nirmal's diary begins with the Hindu legend from the Puranic tradition of Shiva controlling the vibrant and torrential Ganga in his braids thereby preventing the universe from drowning. The region, however, owes its existence not to this popular version of the myth but to its lesser known twist which "comes as a surprise, because it is never told and thus never imagined" (*HT*, 6). This version explains that "there is a point at which the braid comes undone; where Lord Shiva's matted hair is washed apart into a vast, knotted tangle. Once past that point the river throws off its bindings and separates into hundreds, maybe thousands, of tangled strands" (*HT*. 6). Myth/legend thus narrates a sacred history. It relates an event that took place in primordial Time. It

describes how through the action of Supernatural agents the Cosmos or only a fragment of reality came into existence.

"There is no village in India, however mean", asserts Raja Rao in his Foreword to *Kanthapura*, "that has not a rich *sthala-purana*, or legendary history, of its own" (v). The Sundarbans, too, has its *sthala-purana* or spatial history, the legend of Bon Bibi. Such is the specific rootedness of this history that even Kanai, a skilled translator, acknowledges his inability to translate Bon Bibi's hymn when Fokir chants it: "in those words there was a history that was not just his own but also of this place, the tide country" (*HT*, 354). Even the city-bred Nirmal who dismissed this myth as "'all the usual stuff [...] Gods, saints, animals, demons'" (*HT*, 102) and dubbed it "false consciousness" (*HT*, 222) finally concedes that "those words were much more than a part of a legend: this was the story that gave this land its life" (*HT*, 354). The Bon Bibi legend not only provides means for human behaviour to the tide country people but also gives meaning and value to their lives. By ceremonially recounting the myth or by performing the rituals associated with it, these marginalized beings "live" the myth, seized by the sacred, exalting power of the events recollected or re-enacted. The myth "lives" in Fokir and "in some way, perhaps, it still plays a part in making him the person he is" (*HT*, 354). The illiterate Fokir has internalized the myth to such an extent that since his childhood "*these words have become a part of him*" (*HT*, 248, italics original). "Living" a myth entails a genuinely "religious" experience elevated from the mundane, everyday existence. The "religiousness" of this experience is due to the fact that "one re-enacts fabulous, exalting, significant events, one again witnesses the creative deeds of the Supernaturals; one ceases to exist in the everyday world and enters a transfigured, auroral world impregnated with the Supernaturals' presence" (Eliade, 19). The mythical events are hence not only commemorated but also reiterated and re-lived. The essence of myth lies in repetition, not change. What it implies is that through the re-enactment of the myth one jumps out of linear or chronological time and lives in the primordial time. The mythical figures become contemporaneous with the present and all temporal divisions are dissolved:

> To re-experience that time, to re-enact it as often as possible, to witness again the spectacle of the divine works, to meet with the Supernaturals and relearn their creative lesson through all the ritual reiterations of myths. In short, myths reveal that the

> world, man, and life have a supernatural origin and that this history is significant, precious and exemplary. (Eliade, 19)

As a "vital ingredient" of human civilization, myth thus "expresses, enhances and codifies belief; [...] safeguards and enforces morality; [...] vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man" (Malinowski, 101).

Transmitted orally across different temporal epochs, the cultural narrative of Bon Bibi does have a written version. It is attributed to a Muslim author Abdur-Rahim bearing the title *Bon Bibir Karamoti orthat Bon Bibi Johurnama* ("The Miracles of Bon Bibi or the Narrative of Her Glory"). Kanai, who witnessed the theatrical representation of the legend, was surprised to see that unlike the conventional Hindu mythologies it was set neither in the heavens nor on the banks of the Ganges but in the Arabian city of Medina with mosques and minarets at the background. This cultural syncretism permeates the linguistic sphere as well. For Nirmal the folklore manifested "*a strange variety of Bangla, deeply interpenetrated by Arabic and Persian* [...] *the pages opened to the right, as in Arabic, not to the left as in Bangla. Yet the prosody was that of much of Bangla folklore*" (*HT*, 246-247, italics original). Dissolving generic boundaries by combining prose and poetry, the folklore is indeed "*a strange hybrid*" (*HT*, 247, italics original). What is more hymns to the figurines of Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli are recited as in any other household Hindu puja, but they all begin with invocations to "Bismillah" of the Queen and repeatedly refer to Allah. To the American cetologist Piya, a denizen of a remote life-world, Fokir's worship of Bon Bibi in this hybrid manner seems to be a "strange little ritual" (*HT*, 152). This exchange of identities between Hindu and Islam religions and their harmonious co-existence elucidate Vladimir Propp's observations on folklore as a site of palimpsest where the past and the present enjoy simultaneity:

> [...] in cases where history produces new forms of life, new economic achievements, new forms of social relations [...] older forms do not die off or become replaced by new one. The old continues to co-exist with the new, either simultaneously or by creating different hybrid combinations. (58)

This translation of Hindu gods into expressions of Islamic divinity is a "nonmodern" instance of "cross-categorical translation" (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 83) which brings to mind an eighteenth-century Bengali

religious text called *Shunya-puran*. The translation is based on local and particular exchange, enunciates Gautam Bhadra, and not on a universal set of rules:

> One of the major features of these types of cultural interaction [between Hindus and Muslims] is to be seen at the linguistic level. Here, recourse is often had to the consonance of sounds or images to transform one god into another, a procedure that appeals more...to popular responses to alliteration, rhyming and other rhetorical devices – rather than to any elaborate structure of reason and argument. (65)

Cutting through the limitations of space and time, the legend of Bon Bibi consolidates the community life of the primitive society of the tidal people as they "enter into ritual, acquiring in this new contest a magic significance (which is in general highly specific as regards its cultic or ritualistic meaning). Ritual and everyday life are tightly interwoven with each other"(Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 12). The Bon Bibi cult and the histories of the Sundarbans are thus seamlessly interwoven. There is thus no "overarching censoring/limiting/defining systems of thought that neutralize and relegate differences to the margins" (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 86). Every life-world has its own particular rules of functioning which produces what may be called "affective histories" that cannot be assimilated to some abstract universal. This transcultural fusion of elements in the Sundarbans confirms Nirmal's contention that

> [...]*the mudbanks of the tide country are shaped not only by rivers of silt, but also by rivers of language: Bengali, English, Arabic, Hindi, Arakanese and who knows what else? Flowing into each other they create a proliferation of small worlds that hang suspended in the flow*[...]*the tide country's faith is something like one of its great mohanas, a meeting not just of many rivers, but a circular roundabout people can use to pass in many directions – from country to country and even between faiths and religions.* (*HT*, 247, italics original)

The space of the tide country thus subsumes the totality of lived experience.

Human settlement in the Sundarbans was initiated by a philanthropic Scot shipping magnate Sir Daniel Hamilton. A "monopolikapitalist" (*HT*, 50), Hamilton was a strange amalgam of individualism and idealism. A man of great enterprise, he purchased ten thousand acres of land in the Sundarbans from the colonial government and invited impoverished and dispossessed people to begin fresh agricultural projects with the precondition that all differences and barriers between them would have to be sloughed off: "'Here there would be no Brahmins or Untouchables, no Bengalis and no Oriyas. Everyone would have to live and

work together'" (*HT*, 51). In the constantly shifting, phantasmagoric terrain of the Sundarbans, the visionary Scot desired to create a utopian world where each individual would enjoy a fluidity of identities and manifest a plethora of selves: "'He dreamed of a place where men and women could be farmers in the morning, poets in the afternoon and carpenters in the evening'" (*HT*, 53). Like his predecessors in *The Circle of Reason*, Balaram and Alu, Hamilton intended to establish an egalitarian society run by co-operatives "'where people wouldn't exploit each other and everyone would have a share in the land'" (*HT*, 53). What is more, this "'new kind of country'" (*HT*, 52) was not only well advanced in ideas but also in technology. The tide country boasted telephone connections long before they were established in the metropolis of Kolkata. Many islands in the region were named after Hamilton's relatives – Jamshedpur, Annpur, Emilybari. The house in which he lived was named Lusibari, a pidgin version of "Lucy's House". It was named after his kin who unfortunately died on her voyage to India. If Hamilton's idealism and persistence made these remote islands fit for human habitation, the arrogance and short-sightedness of the colonial administrative machinery almost brought about their destruction. British officials in colonial India urgently needed a suitable location in eastern India to establish a port which would rival Bombay on the Western coast. The hasty, impulsive decision of the imperialists to build the projected sea-port on the storm-ridden Matla river matched the crankiness of Mohannad Bin Tughlaq, the mad Sultan of Delhi: "' [i]t was a bee from the same hive that stung the British. They got it in their heads that they needed a new port, a new capital for Bengal — Kolkata's Hooghly River was silting up and its docks, they said, would soon be choked with mud'" (*HT*, 284). Henry Piddington, a scientific soothsayer, warned the British government about the unpredictable nature of the Matla and the bleak prospects of the envisaged projects. But the British Viceroy Lord Canning's haughtiness and his cherished desire to name the port after him brushed aside all warnings. The phenomenon of place-naming was a common colonial practice as "the renaming of colonized territories [...] played an important part in the domination of these territories" (Bohata, 11). Piddington's apprehensions were dismissed because he "after all, was nothing but a lowly shipping inspector and [...] stood very low in the Ingrej scale of caste" (*HT*, 286). Ignoring his advice, Canning established his new port which was, as anticipated, decimated not by a cyclone but by a minor storm. Thus

the port "that was to be one of the reigning queens of the eastern oceans, a rival to Bombay, Singapore and Hong Kong, became instead the Matla's vassal — Canning" (*HT*, 287). The abandoned port "'*a post office on Sunday*'" (*HT*, 287) is a relic of punctured British pride, a dark chapter in colonial history, unrecorded in official versions. The fact that the tide country has been involved in the developments of metropolitan modernity proves that the rural world, far from being an empty and homogeneous one, has always been touched by cosmopolitanism.

The silencing or subalternizing propensities of colonialist representations are often evident in elite representations within the colonized. Subaltern studies affirm the notion of resistance to elite domination and re-direct attention to the disenfranchised sectors of society. They insist that the "reclamation of tradition and the (re-) construction of national culture after colonialism require a recovery of popular consciousness across the full range of its social articulations" (Lazarus, 8). Subaltern studies with its attention to "the small voice of history", is a corrective to both colonialist and bourgeois-nationalist historiography. Since the history of the ruling classes is realized in the state and "official" history is the history of states and dominant groups, the history of subaltern social groups, believes Gramsci, is necessarily fragmented and episodic. The task of the modern, egalitarian, subaltern historian is to rectify this imbalance in historiography with its exclusive focus on elite representations. Ranajit Guha's famous manifesto highlighting the "failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation" ("On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India", 5) formulates the gospel of the project:

> What is clearly left out of the un-historical [elitist] historiography is the *politics of the* people. For parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and intermediate strata in town and country — that is, the people. This was an *autonomous* domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter ("On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India", 4).

Subalternity encompasses the undocumented experiences of marginalized social groups. It also includes plural ways of being in the world that remain "untranslatable" into modern, rational forms of historical consciousness.

Smothering all differences, totalitarian historiography explains discrepant "life-worlds" like an insurgent tribal's religious motivation for his rebellion in terms of secular knowledge. A subaltern historian resists this overarching explanatory mechanism of History which assimilates all "differences" into a blanket of sameness. For Dipesh Chakrabarty these "subaltern" pasts represent

> moments or points at which the archive that the historian mines develops a degree of intractability with respect to the aims of professional history. [...] these are pasts that resist historicization [...]. Subaltern pasts, [...], do not belong exclusively to socially subordinate or subaltern groups, nor to minority identities alone. Elite and dominant groups can also have subaltern pasts to the extent that they participate in life-worlds subordinated by the major narratives of the dominant institutions. (*Provincializing Europe*, 101)

History writing thus "assumes plural ways of being in the world" (*Provincializing Europe*, 101). Against the excesses of mainstream History which is entwined with the rationality of the state and implicated in the practices of suppression, subaltern historicality recalls the past in the phenomenology of everyday life. Hence, suggests Ranajit Guha, "one should turn to the poet and the fiction writer to learn how to represent in language the lived presence of historicality in everyday practice" (Chatterjee, "Introduction", 16). The primary object of the subaltern historian is "of making an absence into presences, of peopling a vacant space with figures":

> The task now is to fill up this emptiness, that is, the representation of subaltern consciousness in elitist historiography. It must be given its own specific content with its own history and development. [...] Only then can we recreate not merely a whole aspect of human history whose existence elitist historiography has hitherto denied, but also the history of the "modern" period, the epoch of capitalism. (Chatterjee, "Peasants, politics and historiography", 62)

The idealist Nirmal's journal which records the plight of the dispossessed refugees in Morichjhapi against the brutalities of state oppression therefore serves as a vital subaltern testament.

A leftist intellectual and a college teacher in Calcutta, Nirmal was dissociated from his family in Dhaka by the events of the Partition. A product of a family renowned for public service, Nilima is soaked in middle class culture. Nirmal's vitality has an irresistible charm of its own and in Nilima's eyes he becomes invested with the mystery and romance of an unknown mode of existence: "it was as if the light of idealism in his eye was a flame and she a moth"

(*HT*, 76). Despite her family's strong resentment, Nilima marries Nirmal. Before long Nirmal's leftist leanings lead to his detainment by the police, an incident that has a debilitating effect on his psyche. Nilima's family stands by the couple in their distress and it is by their initiative that Nirmal is appointed a teacher to run the Lusibari school in the Sundarbans. Interestingly, their arrival in Gosaba coincides with the annual celebration of the founder Sir Daniel Hamilton's birthday which is "observed with many of the ceremonial trappings of a *puja*" (*HT*, 78). The visionary Scotsman is revered by the locals as a "venerated ancestral spirit" (*HT*, 78) if not as a deity. Recognizing the altruistic endeavours of the Scot, the city-bred couple's entire perspective undergoes a radical transformation: "It shamed them to think that this man — a foreigner, a Burra Sahib, a rich capitalist — had taken it upon himself to address the issue of rural poverty when they themselves, despite all their radical talk, had scarcely any knowledge of life outside the city" (*HT*, 78). What they experience in the islands is utter destitution. Life is lived in the extremes at the mercy of nature because of economic compulsions. While the men venture out into the waters for livelihood, the women dress themselves as widows "trying to hold misfortune at bay by living through it over and over again. Or was it merely a way of preparing themselves for that which they knew to be inevitable" (*HT*,80)? Grappling with the question, "'[w]hat is to be done?'" (*HT*,80), the idealist Nirmal reads Lenin's pamphlet repeatedly without any definite solution, the pragmatic Nilima mobilizes a women's union. While the Hamilton Estate is crippled by lawsuits, Nilima's union continues to grow and gradually culminates into the Badabon Development Trust. As the supreme authority of the Trust, Nilima with her resolve and enterprise elevates into *Mashima*. The Trust is her own exclusive domain, a forbidden zone for her husband.

Nirmal finds his cause elsewhere. Hounded out from their homeland in Bangladesh during the Partition, a group of refugees were rehabilitated in the forests of Dandakaranya in central India. Officially termed "'resettlement'" (*HT*,118), their existence was continuously scrutinized by security forces as in a concentration camp. While these poor rural people were ruthlessly exploited both by Muslim communists and upper class Hindus in Bangladesh, they were looked upon as intruders in central India and often attacked with weapons by the locals. In 1978, a hoard of refugees repatriated from the parched lands of Madhya

Pradesh to the marshlands of the Sundarbans in search of livelihood. These poor people settled in the islands of Morichjhapi, a protected forest reserve. This brought the state government into a series of confrontations with the refugees and it was determined to evict them. Inspired by the resistance of these Dalits, Nirmal's dormant revolutionary instinct comes to the forefront and he identifies himself with them. Reflecting on her husband's revolutionary zeal, Nilima contends that

> '[m]en like that, even when they turn their backs on their party and their comrades, can never let go of the idea: it's the secret god that rules their hearts. It is what makes them come alive; they revel in the danger, the exquisite pain. It is to them what childbirth is to a woman, or war to a mercenary'. (*HT*,119)

Nirmal thus plunges himself into the struggle between a group of powerless refugees and a dominant political force.

The commune established by these "unhistorical" squatters in Morichjhapi is considered to be extra-ordinary by the idealist Nirmal. Witnessing "*the birth of something new, something hitherto unseen*" (*HT*,171, italics original), Nirmal feels that Daniel Hamilton's utopian project is being translated into a concrete reality but with a vital difference: "*this was not one man's vision. This dream had been dreamt by the very people who were trying to make it real*" (*HT*,171, italics original). The revolution of this subaltern consciousness from below initiates Nirmal's transformation. These marginalized beings organized themselves and created the edifices of a micro-society which impresses Nirmal: "*It was an astonishing spectacle — as though an entire civilization had sprouted suddenly in the mud*" (*HT*,191, italics original). They had set up their own government and also taken a census. What they now endeavour is to make their voices heard in the world outside and mobilize public opinion rather than being falsely represented in government files as "*destroyers*" and "*gangsters*" (*HT*,172, italics original). For this purpose they invite the urban intellectuals to a sumptuous feast to orient them about their hapless condition. The impressed guests deliver extensive speeches extolling the efforts of the settlers but their hollowness is revealed by one of Nirmal's erstwhile friend Khokon: "'*You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs*'" (*HT*,192, italics original). Considered as eggs or insignificant non-entities, these marginalized beings would soon be driven out of the island or meet a silent death.

While the visionary Nirmal completely aligns him with the refugees in Morichjhapi, the worldly-wise Nilima chooses to keep safe distance from them and urges Nirmal to do the same. She prefers to "'stay on the right side of the government'" (*HT*, 214) because she does not intend to antagonize the politicians for the welfare of the Badabon Trust hospital. Hence, if the settlers in Morichjhapi are "'*human beings*'" for Nirmal who "'need medical attention as much as people do anywhere else'" (*HT*, 213, italics original) Nilima dismisses them as "'*squatters*'": "'*that land doesn't belong to them; it's government property. How can they just seize it*'" (*HT*, 213, italics original)? While Nirmal asserts his subjectivity against oppressive government machinery, NIlima's subjectivity is repressed. James Kavanagh believes that "[w]e now understand this process of 'subjection' as working largely through an address to unconscious fears and desires as well as rational interests, and we understand it as working through a multiplicity of disparate, complexly interconnected social apparatuses" (310). Most certainly, Nilima's individuality is crushed by a "Repressive State Apparatus" which function "'by violence', [...] massively and predominantly by *repression* (including physical repression)" (Althusser, 145). The miserable refugees refuse to succumb to the terror tactics unleashed by the people in power. Besieged by the onrushing police, a group of refugees carrying provisions for their fellow islanders in a boat proclaim in unison: "'*Amra kara? Bastuhara. Who are we? We are the dispossessed*'" (*HT*,254, italics original). The plaintive cry of these wretched people forces Nirmal to interrogate his own identity and his space in the world:

> *And as I listened to the sound of those syllables, it was as if I were hearing the deepest uncertainties of my heart being spoken to the rivers and the tides. Who was I? Where did I belong? In Kolkata or in the tide country? In India or across the border? In prose or in poetry?* (*HT*,254, italics original)

Inspired by the settler's defiant spirit, Nirmal's series of self-questionings meets a happy resolution: "*Where else could you belong, except in the place you refused to leave. I joined my feeble voice to theirs: 'Morichjhâpi chharbona!*'" (*HT*,254, italics original). Nirmal's narrative is an eye-witness account of police atrocities unleashed on these dispossessed in quest of their homeland. To quell the desperate cries of the settlers, the patrolling police motorboat suddenly picks up speed and destroys the boat full of passengers and provisions. The announcement of the

High Court order which declares that the siege is illegal and has to be lifted is just a lull before the storm. Already the condition of these people is destitute and with all supplies stopped they are being starved to death. It is sheer inhumanity on the part of a callous state machinery to declare that the island has to be evacuated for the preservation of ecological balance. Through the grievances of Kusum, the subaltern voice articulates its plight of living on the age:

> *'Saar', [...] 'the worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, was worth less than dirt or dust. [...] it seemed to me that this whole world has become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil.'* (*HT*,261-62, italics original).

It dawns on the resigned Nirmal that the fate of Kusum and the others on the island is doomed forever. While he is stunned into insanity by administrative brutalities, his wife wryly comments that her husband is an unpractical individual whose "'experience of the world is very limited'" (*HT*,276, italics original). The psychiatrist from Kolkata who comes to treat Nirmal dismisses the settlers as "'*a nuisance*'" (*HT*,275, italics original). Nirmal gives Nilima the slip, surreptitiously enters Morichjhapi with Horen, and documents his experiences the night before the imminent police onslaught. He was later found on the embankment in Canning and lived only a couple of months after the evacuation. His diary survives as a vital subaltern testament.

Nirmal is a witness to the events leading up to the holocaust. His journal does not narrate the carnage, presumably because it interrupted his composition and later drove him insane. Nevertheless, he was well aware of the impending catastrophe and could anticipate the inevitable: "*I am out of time*" (*HT*,277, italics original). He fits the bill for Agamben's concept of the witness, a person who has experienced an event from the beginning to the end. He is a witness that possesses a memory of "things seen at close hand" (34), a "superstes witness" capable of bearing testimony to the events as experienced (17). Agamben classifies the superstes witness under several rubrics. On the one hand, there is Primo Levi, the "perfect example of the witness [...] the 'proxy witness', a superstile who has survived and recounts his experiences in Auschwitz" (16, 34). On the other hand is the Muselman, the "complete witness" or the "true witness" (47), the one who could not survive, and is unable to recount his experience. Living in close

proximity to the victims and driven out of his mind by violence, Nirmal operates between the poles of speech and silence; his journal is a vivid rendition of the events. While he inscribes the incidents in his journal "*every moment takes on a startling clarity; small things become the world in microcosm*" (*HT*,148, italics original). The dominant metaphor that he uses for himself is of "*some misplaced, misgendered Scheherazade*" who tries to delay the inevitable trauma with the power of his stories: "*I am trying to stave the night off with a flying, fleeting pen*" (*HT*,148, italics original). Explicit is the reference to princess Scheherazade of *Thousand and One Nights* who weaves a complex amalgam of stories to postpone her death. In Ghosh's "The Hunger of Stones", a translation of Tagore's "Khudito Pashan", the protagonist declares that it "seemed to me that a night from the Thousand and One Nights had transported itself here from the realm of fiction" (*II*, 332). When Horen asks Nirmal engrossed in his copy of Bernier's "Travels": "'Saar, what is that you're reading? Are there any stories in it? Why not tell me too, since we have such a long way to go'" (*HT*,145), the latter translates to him not only from one language to another to make it accessible to him but also from the written form to the oral form of storytelling. Nirmal's emphatic "'All right, then, [...] Listen'" (*HT*,145) is an archetypal beginning in the oral tradition.

Nirmal is very much aware of the silencing propensities of official history as also the ephemerality of life in the tide country. In the tidal world time is shaped with each ebbing and rising tide, "*that after the storm passes, the events that have preceded its coming will be forgotten*". He is fully aware "*how skilful the tide country is in silting over its past*" (*HT*, 69). Nirmal records the incidents in detail to prevent his memories from being erased. In a post-structural world which celebrates the destabilization of the nature of signification and rejects the power of language to reflect empirical reality, Nirmal demonstrates the humanistic faith in logo centric security: "*I was once a writer; perhaps I can make sure at least that what happened here leaves some trace, some hold upon the memory of the world*" (*HT*,69, italics original). Nirmal not only records the experiences of the settlers but also writes his own self, about his vacillations and his ideals. Most revealing is his confession that he is indeed a split-self torn between his wife and "the woman who had become the muse I'd never had; between the quiet persistence of everyday change and the heady excitement of revolution — between prose and poetry" (*HT*,216). His sense of oneness with the refugees and

his spiritual passion for Kusum transforms his self. Gradually, he experiences the withering away of his unbelieving secularism as he begins respecting the myth of Bon Bibi. His rational, secular, Marxist consciousness dismissed religious devotion to Bon Bibi as "*false consciousness*" (*HT*,222, italics original). This, coupled with the horrors of religious fanaticism during the Partition, forbids him to identify with any sets of religious beliefs. But the strong beliefs of Kusum and Horen and their acts of worship in the middle of the mohana at Garjontala make the invisible very much visible to Nirmal. They thrust on him the idea that they had just crossed the imaginary line that separated the realm of human beings from the abode of Dokkhin Rai and his demons. He

> *[r]ealized, with a sense of shock, that this chimerical line was, to her and to Horen, as real as a barbed-wire fence might be to me. [...] it occurred to me that in a way a landscape too is not unlike a book — a compilation of pages that overlap without any two ever being the same. [...] On occasion these pages are ruled with lines that are invisible to some people, while being for others, as real, as charged and as volatile as high-voltage cables.*" (*HT*,222, italics original)

Nirmal's realization affirms multiple ways of being-in-the-world, difference and heterogeneity and the limitations of the artifice of modern reason. His recognition of the rural's religiosity is a celebration of the autonomous subjectivity of these marginalized beings, an attempt to bridge the gap with the nonmodern: "*To me, a townsman, the tide country's jungle was emptiness, a place where time stood still: I saw now that this was an illusion, that exactly the opposite was true.* [...] *here, in the tide country, transformation is the rule of life*" (*HT*,224, italics original). In the Sunderbans where the mangroves can recolonize a denuded land in double quick time, transience governs the lives of the people. The self-transformed visionary, standing in the ephemerality of his conditions, quotes his inspiration Rilke: "'*life is lived in transformation*'" (*HT*,225, italics original). Having gained a profound insight into the power of completed transformation, its stronger existence, and the terror that it represents, Nirmal finds in the tide country landscape a strange beauty bordering on the sublime that Rilke evocatively describes: "'*beauty is nothing/ but the start of terror we can hardly bear,/and we adore it because of the serene scorn/ it could kill us with*'" (*HT*,69, italics original). The resourceful and enduring creatures of the natural world live on the pre-conscious side of reality. These instinctive creatures, Nirmal contends after the poet, detect the humans' uneasiness with the world of language and thought:

"'we're not comfortably at home in our translated world'" (*HT*,206, italics original). Bringing in Rilke to voice his opinions, Nirmal expresses his own empathy with the dolphins and establishes a continuum of self-awareness and understanding: "'some mute animal/ raising its calm eyes and seeing through us,/ and through us'" (*HT*,235, italics original). Nirmal represents is very much alienated from the world by language. He is a denizen of a world translated through stories and fails to interpret correctly the practical reality surrounding him. Like Tridib in *The Shadow Lines*, with whom Nirmal shares a spiritual affinity, he is destroyed by the violent actions of the real world. He delineates the multiple tropes of the tidal landscape in his journal. What he highlights is the expatriation of human beings from one space to another and observes an intimate bond between humanscape and landscape that Bakhtin emphasizes: "It is necessary to find a new relationship to nature, not to the little nature of one's own corner of the world but to the big nature of the great world, to all the phenomena of the solar system, to the wealth excavated from the earth's core, to a variety of geographical locations and continents" (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 234). Nirmal's life-long project has been to fuse his revolutionary ideals and Rilke's poetry, his engagement with the history of *bhatir desh* (tide country) and his concern for the displaced refugees. Professing to be a historical materialist but the least materialist in his actions, Nirmal, sums up Kanai "'was possessed more by words than by politics. There are people who live through poetry and he was one of them'" (*HT*,282). Historical materialism, for Nirmal, "'meant that everything which existed was interconnected : the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature'" (*HT*,282-283). A practicing deep ecologist, Nirmal thus rejects the dualism between humans and nature promoted by Western philosophy and calls for a return to a monistic, primal oneness between human beings and the ecosphere:

> Deep ecology is concerned with encouraging an egalitarian attitude on the part of humans not only toward all *members* of the ecosphere, but even toward all identifiable *entities* or *forms* in the ecosphere. Thus, this attitude is intended to extend, for example, to such entities (or forms) as rivers, landscapes, and even species and social systems considered in their own right. (Sessions, 270)

This shift from a man-centred to a cosmos-centred system of values is the cardinal doctrine of Nirmal's philosophy.

Nirmal's journal and his socialist ideologies provide an alternate perspective to the clash between government agencies and the immigrants. A social worker and a practical thinker, Nilima works women's welfare and childrens' education in the tide country. Years of hard work and dedication have gone into the making of the Bada Bon Trust hospital and the school in Lusibari. These establishments signify cultural changes in the Sundarbans. Timeless human endeavour has populated the islands with human presence providing a new definition to the land teeming with alternative economic opportunities:

> Such was the hospital's reputation, Moyna said, that people now came there from great distances. ... Over the years, a number of tea-shops, guest-houses, and stands for cycle-vans had taken root and flourished. Directly or indirectly the hospital now provided employment to the majority of Lusibari's inhabitants. (*HT*,132-133).

It doesn't take long for Kanai to appreciate "the sheer scale of Nilima's achievement" (*HT*,131). Nilima's "sheaf of files" (*HT*,240) and records provide an alternative perspective on the animal-human dynamics in the region and raise issues on wildlife conservation. She contends that at least a hundred people are killed by tigers each year. This figure is only that of the Indian part of the Sundarbans and if the Bangladesh side is included the number is twice that. The region is indeed a war zone between the animal and the human world. The tigers' encroachment into human settlements, contends Nilima, might be because of "the peculiar conditions of tidal ecology, in which large parts of the forest were subjected to daily submersions. The theory went that this raised the animals' thresholds of aggression by washing away their scent markings and confusing their territorial instincts" (*HT*,241). The demarcating lines between human space and the animal world are blurred. The novel probes deeper into the problems of the human-animal dynamics. Strangely, although the number of people killed by tigers is always on the ascending side, environmentalists pour in economic resources for the conservation of tigers. Like Kusum, Nilima raises a typical subaltern question with her wry observation that the forest department was "providing water for tigers! In a place where nobody thinks twice about human beings going thirsty" (*HT*,241)!

The narrative explores the encounters of two cosmopolitan, multicultural professionals with the local environmental-cultural aspects of the tidal land. While Kanai is a Delhi based linguist who runs his own translation firm, Piya ia an

American cetologist of Bengali origin researching on a rare species of Gangetic dolphin, the Orcaella. Their paths cross each other on the train to the Sundarbans. Both these characters look at the rural world through the cosmopolitan lens and their worldviews are reshaped by actual engagement with local people and cultures different from them. A mediator and a translator, Kanai learns to understand him better. Piya, who "had no more idea of what her own place was in the great scheme of things" (*HT*,35) finds her sensibility moulded "in a place where she felt even more a stranger than elsewhere" (*HT*,35). Their experiences give credence to the contention that a cosmopolitan worldview is constantly in a process of becoming rather than being.

Kanai's first visit to the Sundarbans was way back in the 1970s when as a young schoolboy he was "rusticated" to live with his uncle and aunt for misbehaviour in school. He was amazed at the population in the tide country and learnt from Nirmal that it is only in films that jungles are empty of people: "'Here there are places that are as crowded as any Kolkata Bazaar. And on some of the rivers you'll find more boats than there are trucks on the Grand Trunk Road'" (*HT*,17). He absorbed all his experiences with a child's customary sense of wonder. His only friend in the island was Kusum, a girl in her mid-teens. It was with Kusum that Kanai witnessed the theatrical performance of *The Glory of Bon Bibi*. This theatrical spectacle arrests Kanai's attention and grips his emotion to such an extent that he "was utterly absorbed and even after the show had ended was unable to erase some of the scenes from his mind". Verisimilitude is created through content rich and lifelike and extricated from the existential to the aesthetic plane. This aesthetic pleasure, which art's fictionality vouchsafes, results from a non-utilitarian, nonmoral, absolutely disinterested perception of art. The performance creates for Kanai an illusion of reality: "The terror he had felt when the demon charged Dukhey was real and immediate, [...]. No less real were the tears of joy and gratitude that flowed from his eyes when Bon Bibi appeared at Dukhey's side" (*HT*, 105). While Kanai was mesmerized, Kusum wept profusely as she understood the vital difference between art-world and the world of existential reality. Unlike the fictional world, Bon Bibi never arrived to save her father when the tiger attacked him in spite of Kusum's fervent prayers for help. However, a successful work of art works inwards. It leaves a detritus at the bottom of a consumer's being. This emotional deposit permeates and shapes his entire

personality unawares. It does so primarily by activating his imagination, by intensifying and refining his emotion. It is thus "by placing the reader in his own affective state of mind, the poet, without inculcating doctrines, directly forms character" (Abrams, 329). The myth of Bon Bibi that Kusum has internalized is further grounded in her psyche by her art-experience.

Nilima's request occasions Kanai's next visit to the tide country decades later. His late uncle Nirmal has left behind a journal meant specifically for him. Written a long time back, the seemingly lost journal has been accidentally found in a remote corner of the house. In his chance meeting with Piya on the train to Canning, Kanai introduces himself as "'a translator, and an interpreter as well, by profession'" (*HT*, 10). Translation does play a vital role in the narrative. A linguist who knows six different languages and possesses a translation agency, Kanai acts as the mediating agency between the English-speaking Piya and the indigenous tide-country people with their local dialect. Nirmal's journal is interspersed with intertextual elements from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, originally composed in German. Nirmal read Rilke's poems in "*Bangla and English translation*" (*HT*,68, italics original). When Kanai narrates to Piya the unofficial history of Canning port he renders the story he himself heard from Nirmal with a word of caution: "'But don't forget: I'll be translating in my head – he would have told it in Bangla'" (*HT*, 283). The metaphor of translation seems to underline the phenomenon of communication across the barriers of linguistic divides in a multilingual world. As an interpreter Kanai mediates not only between the divisions of language, but also between temporal divides and modes of representation, be it writing or speech. The motif of translation also questions the traditional philosophical procedure of reducing languages as the tool of discrete and unequivocal concepts. A genuine discipline of thought, translation "becomes a place where one's language is made to feel its finitude, even its failure, so providing a threshold to its unthought"(Clark, 80). What is questioned is the autonomy of the subject in the knowledge system.

When she reaches Canning, Piya, with the Forest Department's assistance, hires a launch to explore the waters in pursuit of the Orcaella. But the boat owner and the guard turn out to be dubious and Piya feels sexually threatened. In other parts of the world Piya had been protected by the "sheer matter-of-factness of what she did" and also by her "unmistakable foreignness", but in the delta region

where she felt an absolute stranger "her appearance had robbed her of that protection" (*HT*, 34). In this grave situation, Piya is comforted by the sight of a poor fisherman and a boy – Fokir and Tutul – whom her tormenting duo tries to intimidate. Delighted by the fisherman's signs of reassurance that he knows not only the Gangetic but also the Irrawaddy dolphins, Piya pays her guides off and descends to his boat. In the process she turns off-balance and falls overboard, but is rescued by Fokir. Thus begins a relationship in which the only mode of communication is silence and signs.

Belonging to a mobile family, Piya has had a rootless existence. Her paternal grandparents were Bengalis settled in Burma who came to India during the Second World War as refugees. A peripatetic, Piya's engineer father developed his own theories about immigrants and believed that Indians in general and Bengalis in particular are poor travellers because "'their eyes are always turned backwards, towards home'" (*HT*, 250). Endeavouring to "fit in" (*HT*, 250) in his migrated nation America, he looked upon India as an illusory place from which he is fractured in both time and space. Like Ila in *The Shadow Lines*, he encapsulates the doctrine of presentism: "Where others sought to preserve their memories of the 'old country', he had always tried to expunge them. His feet were in the present" (*HT*, 87). Aiming at thorough deculturalization, Piya's parents never felt the urge to orient her about "her Indian heritage" (*HT*, 95). Hence she grows up as a deracinated migrant severed from her roots with scant traces of even her mother tongue. A further reason for her alienation is her parents' unhappy conjugal life "the accumulated resentments" of which were phrased in that language. That is why the sound of Piya's mother tongue represented "the music of unhappiness" (*HT*, 94). Because of her childhood miseries, Piya prefers emotional distance from others at all times. This explains the choice of her subject and the domain of her research because field biology "allowed her to be on her own" (*HT*, 126) without any fixed address in unfamiliar places. Fear of intimacy, contends Lois Tyson, is "often an effective defense against learning about our own psychological wounds because it keeps us at an emotional distance in relationships most likely to bring those wounds to the surface" (16). Piya's expedition with Fokir who carries "the river [...] in his veins" (*HT*, 245) initiates the birth of a new self-awareness in her.

A recluse who revels in lonely fishing expeditions with his son, Fokir is at-oneness with the natural world. The evocative descriptions of Fokir and his son Tutul sleeping together associate them with nature's animism. The repose with which the duo sleeps huddled closely together reminds Piya of the newborn dolphin and its parent: "Their chests were moving in unison as they slept and the rhythm of their breathing reminded her of the pair of dolphins she had been watching earlier" (*HT*, 138). For one reason or another, Fokir dissociates himself from society. He rids himself in the process of all social conventions and practices. His ambitious wife Moyna complains to Kanai that Fokir's actions are the exact opposite of others. While the other fishermen tie their boats together for security in the waters at night, Fokir acts on the contrary by being on his own in a desolate place because he "'can't help himself. He's like a child'" (*HT*, 155). Divesting himself of all the trappings of culture and all received ideas and values, Fokir has resurrected in spirit the pristine state in which man and nature are one as the twofold embodiment of the same amoral, primordial cosmic energy. Michael Bell's insights into primitive sensibility elucidate Fokir's and nature's single undivided totality:

> Primitive men apparently felt in all aspects of the natural world, such as weather, animals and vegetation, the manifestation of a will and a mentality somehow comparable to his own. While no doubt feeling his environment as frequently hostile, primitive man none the less felt his relation to it as continuous rather than radically transcendent or alien. (9)

Like the silent, occult force that directs Ronald Ross's scientific career in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the primitive Fokir guides Piya in her pathbreaking pursuit of a rare species of dolphins. When she realizes the power of Fokir's intuition she is completely "baffled":

> [...] it was as though there were nothing unexpected about his encounter and he had known all along that they would be there. [...] how could he have known that they would run into a group of Orcaella, right then and right in that place? [...] how could he have known that they would be there on that day, at that time? (*HT*, 113)

What is on display is Fokir's instinctive powers intimately associated with the animal past, a radically different world of primitive subjectivity and "the subtlest sensitivity to the peculiar periodicity and rhythm of human life" that Cassirer points out: "for mythical consciousness and feeling a kind of biological time, a

rhythmic ebb and flow of life, precedes the intuition of a properly cosmic time" (Vol. II, 109). Interestingly, in a multi-linguistic world where translation and interpretation occupy a pivotal role, Piya and Fokir communicate through silence at the pre-speech level, "not just because they had no language in common but because that was how it was with human beings, who came equipped, as a species, with the means of shutting each other out" (*HT*, 159). There are two levels of consciousness, believes Humphrey, which can be distinguished: the "speech level" and the "prespeech level". "The prespeech level, [...] involves no communicative basis as does the speech level (whether spoken or written). [...], the prespeech levels of consciousness are not censored, rationally controlled, or logically ordered" (3). With silence as their alternative means of communication, Piya and Fokir manifest qualities of inwardness, subjectivity and a mode of communication that Western rationality hardly recognizes: "the idea that to 'see' was also to 'speak' to others of your kind, where simply to exist was to communicate" (*HT*, 159). In this context, the narrative undercuts the edifice of speech/language as a rational instrument of communication and privileges telepathic means of communication:

> The two of them, Fokir and herself, they could have been boulders or trees for all they knew of each other: and wasn't it better in a way, more honest, that they could not speak? For if you compared it to the ways in which dolphins' echoes mirrored the world, speech was only a bag of tricks that fooled you into believing that you could see through the eyes of another being. (*HT*, 159)

In stark contrast to the illusory and deceitful linguistic mode of communication, the dolphin "reflects back to us something more intuitive and spontaneous about ourselves, something that relates human beings to a natural world existing prior to the systematizing, regulating discourses of everyday life" (Barglow, 4). The sincere, honest world of Fokir and Piya supersedes the sophisticated world of simulations.

Fokir's futuristic wife Moyna is the perfect antipode of her atavistic husband. Spirited and self-willed, the enterprising Moyna has received a formal education overcoming all physical hardships and resistance from her family. To unsettle her ambitious plans, her parents married her off to the illiterate Fokir. Determined to qualify as a fully fledged nurse in the Trust hospital, Moyna compelled Fokir to move to Lusibari when she was a trainee. Empowered by

education and propelled by the alternative employment opportunities created by the modern hospital, Moyna unsettles the dominant order of patriarchy and establishes a space for herself. As a Third World rural woman who redraws the boundaries of her existence Moyna is a transgressor. She is, of course, not untroubled by a non-co-operating husband "who could not keep step" (*HT*, 134). A liberating female agency, Moyna yearns to be a modern woman "to lay claim to a wider world" (*HT*, 135). Signifiers of modernity, the school and the hospital are cultural constructs redefining the tidal country and fostering a change in perspective. Moyna raises the vital issue of the dialectics of change and wants her son Tutul to reject his father's vocation. She shares Nilima's deep concern for tidal ecology and calls for a ban on the new nylon nets. For the urbanized, go-getting Kanai, Moyna is a woman who "'knows what she wants – for herself and her family – and nothing is going to keep her from pursuing it. She's ambitious, she's tough and she's going to go a long way'" (*HT*, 196). The sensitive Piya quite correctly surmises that Kanai's estimate of Piya validates the choices he has made in his own life:

> It was important for him to believe that his values were, at bottom, egalitarian, liberal, meritocratic. It reassured him to be able to think, 'What I want for myself is no different from what everybody wants, no matter how rich or poor; everyone who has any drive, any energy wants to get on in the world – Moyna is the proof'. (*HT*, 219-220)

This process of knowledge formation needs to be explained. Cognition begins when an object attracts a subject and causes in him a train of sensations. The subject then organizes the chaotic sensations into his image of the object in terms of his own personality. So paramount is the subject's role in cognition that it is no exaggeration to say that "what we perceive and understand depends upon what we are" (Huxley, 287). A slave of society and seeking self-fulfillment within the social mould, Kanai dismisses the free-spirited Fokir as an unseen presence. Not unsurprisingly, he fails to comprehend the reason Moyna married Fokir and she slams it on his face: "'You're not a woman and you don't know him. You won't understand'" (*HT*, 156). Out in the waters when Piya imagines Fokir's family to be one bristling with "warmth and companionship" in which "want and deprivation made people pull together all the more tightly" (*HT*, 158) she construes from a woman's perspective, the way his wife would look up to him as a vibrant youth "with fine clean limbs and wide, deep eyes, someone who could

almost have been the dark god of her prayers and dreams" (*HT*, 158). However autonomous and steadfast Moyna may be, she carries in her mind a fundamentally unconscious image of a primordial origin as Jung explains: "Every man carries within him the eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that particular woman, but a definite feminine image. [...] The same is true of the woman: she too has her inborn image of man" (*The Portable Jung*, 173). Her egoistic assertions notwithstanding, it is the unconscious realm of the mind that grounds her self.

Kanai's sophisticated, urban self manifests a tension, a splitting of the personality or disunion. A successful man of the world, Kanai interprets life in terms of clear-cut demarcations without any knowledge of the grey patches in between. A man who disregards the past and looks forward to the future, he reveals his futurism to Piya in unambiguous terms: "'I'm not the kind of person who dwells on the past [...] I like to look ahead'" (*HT*, 198). Hence he is completely surprised at his vivid memories of the Sundarbans from his earlier visit. What Kanai fails to realize is that "memory is a repository or reservoir of records, traces, and anagrams of past events analogous to the records preserved in geological strata. There is no memory of the future" (Meyerhoff, 20). It is the unconscious, contends Jung, which is "the receptacle of all lost memories and of all contents that are still too weak to become conscious" (*The Portable Jung*, 52). Excluded from the "conscious process of adaptation" and submerged for the most part as either totally unconscious or dimly conscious, these psychic factors are "gradually deprived of value and depotentiated" (Jung, *On the Nature of the Psyche*, 39). Kanai's childhood memories, emotionally charged and lying dormant, suddenly flood back to the surface from the depths of the unconscious and catches him unawares. He recollects these single events in their original, qualitative content, conveying "a meaning of selfhood which could not be elicited from the contents of immediate experience" (Meyerhoff, 48): "It (Nirmal's house) was gone now but the image of it that flickered in his memory was no less real to him than the newly constructed student hostel that had taken its place" (*HT*, 88). "Experiences recollected in tranquility", explains Meyerhoff, "reveal a quality which is often lacking in the 'collection' of data constituting the world of immediate experience". Hence, "memories may well appear more 'real', [...] than the original experiences from which they are derived" (48).

Kanai's nightmarish experience in the tide country swamp with Fokir effects a profound change in him as he delves deep into his unconsciousness. His journey into the depths of his psyche is, of course, initiated by his dreams. Out in the waters, accompanying Piya and Fokir in their expedition, a "recurrent childhood nightmare" – the vestiges of his past – comes back to haunt him: "a dream in which he was taking the same examination over and over again" (*HT*, 316). In his dream the examiners were not his teachers but Kusum and Piya, Nilima and Moyna, Horen and Nirmal and the words "*pariksha*, 'examination', 'trial by ordeal'" haunted him. Needless to mention that recurring dreams or recurring dream images are the most reliable indicators of an individual's unconscious concerns. The very next day, the sweltering midday heat induces a kind of torpor in Kanai and as if in a dream he sees Fokir travelling to Seattle with Piya. Emotionally entangled with Piya, what Kanai unconsciously fears is abandonment. Lois Tyson's enunciation serves as an insight into Kanai's mind:

> if my nightmares begin to occur while I'm awake – that is, if the breakdown of my defences is more than temporary, if my anxiety cannot be abated, if the truth hidden by repression comes out before my conscious self in a manner I can neither disguise nor handle – then I am in *crisis*, or *trauma* (21).

For Kanai, Piya was an object of "pure desire", "incarnated in the woman who was standing before him, in the bow, a language made flesh" (*HT*, 269). Indeed sexuality seems to be "the strongest and most immediate instinct, standing out as the instinct above all others" (Jung, *On the Nature of the Psyche*, 68). Kanai's unconscious self thus projects Fokir as his potential rival for Piya's hand. Hence when Fokir spots tracks of a tiger on the shore and mentions that the animal was keeping a close watch on "strangers", Kanai suspects that Fokir "was playing a game with him, perhaps unconsciously" (*HT*, 321) by heightening the inscrutability of the surroundings. The goosebumps on Fokir's skin indicate his fear and he asks Kanai "'[c]an you feel the fear'" (*HT*, 322)? Fokir's question to Kanai is reminiscent of Horen's question to Nirmal years back: "'*Tell me, Saar, bhoi ta ter paisen? Do you feel the fear*'" (*HT*, 244, italics original)? For a rationalist, urban intellectual like Kanai "fear was not [...] an instinct": "It was something learnt, something that accumulated in the mind, through knowledge, experience and upbringing" (*HT*, 322). Cocooned within his own self, he believed that "nothing was harder to share than another person's fear, and at that moment

he certainly did not share Fokir's" (*HT*, 322). It is Horen who pointed out that "'[...] *it's the fear that protects you,* [...] *it's what keeps you alive. Without it the danger doubles*'" (*HT*, 244, italics original). The distinction between fear and anxiety is of some importance in the given context. Fear for Kierkegaard refers to "something definite" (42). A threat is detrimental by its very nature; the fear it inspires has its definitiveness rooted both in the character of the region from which the threat originates and in the entity marked out for harming. Furthermore, "the situation of inching closer without being within striking distance heightens the effect by a degree of uncertainty on the part of the frightened" (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 179-80). The fearful Fokir and the fearless Kanai go ashore to take a closer look at the footprints of the tiger. Fokir, of course, has a reason for his daring act because his mother told him that "this was a place where you had to learn not to be afraid. And if you did, then you might find the answer to your troubles'" (*HT*, 323). Landing on the slippery banks, Kanai and Fokir experience a complete role-reversal of their authoritarian positions, as Fokir, acting as "some hapless traveller's window on an unfamiliar world" uses a rather different form of address with Kanai: "From the respectful *apni* that he had been using before, he had now switched to the same familiar *tui* Kanai had used in addressing him" (*HT*, 325). Before long, in his competition for one-up-man ship with Fokir, Kanai loses his footing in the mud and slips. Exasperated, far from accepting Fokir's help to get out of trouble, he is "powerless to stop the torrent of obscenities that were pouring out of his mouth":

> His anger came welling up with an atavistic explosiveness, rising from sources whose very existence he would have denied: the master's suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste; the townsman's mistrust of the rustic; the city's antagonism to the village. He had thought that he had cleansed himself of these sediments of the past, but the violence with which they came spewing out of him now suggested that they had only been compacted into an explosive and highly volatile reserve. (*HT*, 326)

The rational, intellectualized, cosmopolitan Kanai who has all his life stifled and negated his unconscious suddenly feels it erupting like a volcano. The façade of sophistication that has shrouded his conscious self cracks and he meets himself as something other. The translator Kanai, empowered with the instrument of language, "a transparent film, a prism" (*HT*, 327) could have a glimpse into another mind. Caught completely off-guard deep inside the inscrutable mangrove

forests and having entered the domain of the irrational unconscious, Kanai, through the "opaque, unreadable" eyes of the silent Fokir sees in him "a double for the outside world" who has decimated Fokir's village, burnt his home and killed his mother, for whom the insignificant Fokir's value was "less than that of an animal" (*HT*, 327). He realizes that the prime reason why Fokir has brought him there is that because he wanted Kanai to be judged. Loosed in a boundless expanse in which he is not habituated and experiencing himself as the object of unseen factors what Kanai feels is terror that can be diagnosed as anxiety. "That in the face of which one is anxious", believes Heidegger "is completely indefinite." As he goes on to explain:

> Not only does this indefiniteness leave factically undecided which entity within-the –world is threatening us, but it also tells us that entities within the world are not "relevant" at all. [...] The world has the character of completely lacking in significance. In anxiety one does not encounter this thing or that thing which, as something threatening, must have an involvement. (*Being and Time*, 231)

Confronted with an emptiness beyond limit, an incomprehensible scale of things beyond measure, the linguist Kanai feels emptied of language because the "sounds and signs that had served, in combination, as the sluices between his mind and his senses, had collapsed: his mind was swamped by a flood of pure sensation" (*HT*, 329). Such nothing and nowhere, a phenomenon characterized by total indefiniteness, indicate, according to Heidegger, "that the world as such is that in the face of which one has anxiety" (*Being and Time*, 231). "To be in such a world", contends Ranajit Guha, "is not to be at home in one's environment" ("Not at Home in Empire", 41). Unsurprisingly, Kanai feels "so little at ease" in his "translated world" (*HT*, 328). Standing face to face with his repressed unconsciousness is for the intellectualized urban translator an almost unbearably abnormal experience. For him it is a perfect pointer that he is a misfit in that remote world, an expose of the limitations of his civilized garb as he confesses to Piya "'[t]his is not my element [...] What happened today certainly showed me that'" (*HT*, 334). Kanai loses his composure and collapses on the mud which his quite unbecoming of his "buoyant confidence" (*HT*, 333). Recognizing the shortcomings of language as a rational medium of communication, Kanai acknowledges Moyna's observations on language that "'words are like the winds that blow ripples on the world's surface. The river itself flows beneath, unseen

and unheard'" (*HT*, 335). A remarkably chastened man after the trauma, Kanai refuses to be part of the adventure any further and prepares to depart.

An individual who recoils from emotional involvement with others, Piya's mind is the theatre of consciousness within which the conflicting world views of the primitive Fokir and the civilized Kanai are in continuous dialectical interplay. While she glorifies to Kanai Fokir's "'amazing'" nature and "'incredible instinct: [...] as if he can see right into the river's heart'" (*HT*, 267), Kanai is determined to force the issue on Piya that there is an unbridgeable gap between them: "'You're from different worlds, different planets'" (*HT*, 268). Piya's fascination for Fokir receives a severe blow when she finds him in the centre of a frenzied mob frantically trying to kill an incapacitated tiger that had recently killed a new-born calf. In an act of spirited defiance, reminiscent of May Price in the Dhaka riot in *The Shadow Lines* and Uma in Rangoon in *The Glass Palace*, Piya tries to stop the infuriated mob. Far from coming to her aid, Fokir drags Piya from the scene in spite of her vehement protests. The horrible experience unsettles her and she cannot get out of it: "'It was like something from some other time – before recorded history'" (*HT*, 300).What seems barbarous from the sensitive Piya's perspective is "'just a part of everyday life'" (*HT*, 300) for Horen and Fokir. This dichotomy springs from inhabiting antithetical life-worlds. Piya is oblivious to the danger of living in proximity to the habitats of ferocious wild animals. Western patrons who put a premium on wildlife conservation pay scant regard to the poorest of the poor whose deaths go unrecorded. Interestingly, this incident serves as a perfect metaphor for the Morichjhapi incident. The difference is that while the intruding tiger is ruthlessly attacked by men armed with spears, in Morichjhapi armed police massacred a group of settlers in the name of preserving ecological balance. Kanai's response to Piya establishes the connection between the two events: "'It happens every week that people are killed by tigers. [...] these killings are never reported, never written about in the papers. Isn't that a horror too – that we can feel the sufferings of an animal, but not of human beings'" (*HT*, 300-301)? Kanai's concern articulates the vital question that his childhood friend Kusum, a victim of the Morichjhapi killings, raised a few years earlier to Nirmal: "'*it seemed to me that this whole world has become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil*'" (*HT*, 262, italics original). Anyway, it

is Piya who blames herself for developing an exalted opinion about Fokir, only to be proved wrong once again.

After Kanai and Horen's departure, Fokir and Piya move forward in their expedition. Strangely they notice a disturbance in the dolphins' movements and even come across a carcass. When the boat is at anchor, nature is at its best and induces a sparkle in Piya: "The moist, unmoving air seemed to have a magnifying effect, for this moon was larger and brighter than any she could ever remember seeing" (*HT*, 351). In this magical setting, Piya and Fokir establish a telepathic mode of existence achieving a unity at their unconscious levels. While for animals the world is infinite humans are imprisoned within the grooves of their self-generated ontologies that prevent the transcending of the world of objects. Working with Fokir to locate the elusive dolphins, Piya comes to realize that despite their differences, despite being "people who could not exchange a word with each other", they are able nonetheless to experience a "seamless intertwining of their pleasures and their purposes" (*HT*, 118). Disregarding the epistemic gulf between them, Piya realizes the limitations of language because "speech was only a bag of tricks that fooled you into believing that you could see through the eyes of another being" (*HT*, 132). Originally dismissed as subaltern illiteracy, superstition and silence are reinterpreted as alternative ways of being that expose the shortcomings of Piya's scientific knowledge. The novel prioritizes language but offers seeing, or vision, as an alternative way of perceiving the world. Piya and Fokir emphasize the infinite and non-linguistic nature of a love relationship:

> They sat unmoving, like animals who had been paralyzed by the intensity of their awareness of each other. When their eyes met again it was as if he knew at a glance what she was thinking. [...] It was as if their shared glimpse of the lunar rainbow had somehow broken something that had existed between them, as if something had ended, leaving behind a pain of a kind that could not be understood because it had never had a name. (*HT*, 352-353)

The duo experiences the fulfillment of their integrative potential through self-identification with one another and enjoys the bliss of wholeness. This self-transcending emotion initiates the "feeling of integrative participation" as the self enters into "symbiotic communion with a human being, living or dead, or some higher entity, real or imaginary, of which the self is felt to be a part" (Koestler, 119-120). Enjoying the dynamics of mutual self-absorption Piya comprehends the hitherto incomprehensible music of Fokir: "suddenly the language and the music

were all around her, flowing like a river, and all of it made sense; she understood it all" (*HT*, 360). Her greater insight into Kokir's song is of course guided by Kanai's interpretation of it. Interestingly, Kanai derives meaning out of Fokir's seemingly untranslatable music after his brush with the unconscious. The spell-bound Piya finds herself vacillating between her conscious and unconscious selves, represented by Kanai and Fokir respectively": "[a]lthough the sound of the voice was Fokir's, the meaning was Kanai's, and in the depths of her heart she knew she would always be torn between the one and the other" (*HT*, 360). The rhythmic pattern of her emotions is perhaps metaphorically represented by the ebb and the tide. But the predominance of the unconscious over the conscious self is perhaps complete when Piya and Fokir brave the storm to climb the highest mangrove tree and fasten themselves with the trunk at Garjontala. Fokir shields Piya with his body withstanding the full force of the storm and the massive tidal waves. With their spirits fused, their bodies also coalesce to provide wholeness to their asexual love relationship:

> Their bodies were so close, so finely merged that she could feel the impact of everything hitting him, she could feel the bones of his cheeks as if they had been superimposed upon her own; it was as if the storm had given them what life could not; it had fused them together and made them one. (*HT*, 390)

Thus, class, caste, gender, linguistic and national boundaries collapse, and nature becomes the agency that purges all characters off their cultivated sensibilities. In a striking parallel, the culmination of Kusum's relationship with Horen moments before her death is described in similar evocative terms: "'it was as if the barriers of our bodies had melted and we had flowed into each other as the river does with the sea'" (*HT*, 364). Fokir saves Piya's life by sacrificing his own. True to their symbiotic relationship, "once again, as so often before, he had seemed to understand her, even without words"(*HT*, 393).

Fokir's selflessness affects Piya the most. Cut off from her steadfast anchor, she retreats deep within her own self and is visibly devastated with a stony expression. She becomes "a strangely unnerving presence in the Guest House, a kind of human wraith, inward, uncommunicative, leaden-faced" (*HT*, 394). Moyna's grief is well discernible in her red eyes. Fokir's dead soul unites the two women. Discarding her peripatetic lifestyle, Piya wishes to settle in the tide country, and decides to finance a house for Moyna and education for Tutul. She is

determined to raise funds for Nilima's Trust and take up the project of conservation of the endangered dolphins. Fokir's wisdom and instinctive knowledge not only saves Piya, but also inspires her to embark on the unfinished project which would eventually deepen her association with the tide country. Fokir's crucial act of hospitality inspires her to call it "home". Piya, in a significant Freudian slip, calls Nilima's abode her "home" and later clarifies it by claiming that her home is "'where the Orcaella are'"(*HT*, 400). By associating herself instinctively with Bon Bibi's messenger, who for Nirmal represents the "*gaze of the Poet*" (*HT*, 235), Piya desires to unite her fractured identity, and explore the depths of her unconscious self. Piya arrived in the tide country well equipped with an enormous amount of theoretical knowledge about cetaceans and mammals the limitations of which in this inhospitable terrain are soon exposed. Despite his obvious lack of "education" and technology, Fokir possessed an intimate, intuitive knowledge of the waters of the tide country and its animals. The narrative integrates the modernized "rational" postcolonial with the "mystic" one and proposes a newer humanist vision. Since her Global Positioning System has recorded the zig-zag pattern of her and Fokir's movements, she can commemorate the subaltern hero by naming the project after him. Unfortunately, Nirmal's journal slipped from Kanai's hands amidst the storm and was lost in the waters. But Kanai, who is also returning to Lusibari, voluntarily intends to reconstruct it from his memory; he wants to write the "story of Nirmal's notebook" (*HT*, 399) which would give Morichjhipi to the world. Leela Gandhi points out that postcolonial theory "seeks its anti-colonial counter-narrative in the written word" (*Postcolonial Theory*, 159), and Kanai's textualization and archivisation of Morichjhapi is this counternarrative.

Chapter Eight

Articulating the Marginal

The *Ibis* Trilogy

Strange, the impact of History, the grip it has on us, yet it was nothing but words. Accidental accretions for the most part, leaving most of the story out. We have not yet begun to explore the true power of the Word, I thought. What if we broke all the rules, played games with the evidence, manipulated language itself, made History a partisan ally? — Robert Coover, *Public Burning*

We have many realities. Our problem is that we don't accept that there are many realities. – Gunter Grass in conversation with Salman Rushdie

The paradox of Enlightenment humanism was that, in positing a universal, human subject as the agent of history, it provided an alibi for imperial expansion as an engine of modernization, progress and civilization. — Jeannie Im, *Modernity in Translation*

Enlightenment empiricism puts a premium on the achievement of "reality" to get a reliable fix on the world which is "there to be observed". Deconstructive consciousness challenges this traditional paradigm at every turn whether in terms of its epistemology or explanatory narrative form. With the decline of the over-arching metanarrative, postmodern philosophy awards an increasing importance to language, narrative and discourse. It believes that there is no "real" world "out there" to be described, but a plethora of competing narratives, constructs and representations. Since experiences of the world can be articulated only through language, an apparently objective, impartial representation is a will-o'-the wisp because the cultural and political assumptions of the articulator inevitably erode into it. The continuity between lived experience and its corresponding narrative representation thus severed, narrative as a mode of historical explanation is inadequate. Since language is an ideologically contaminated medium, truth is linked to the "statements of power, which produce and sustain it" (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 131-132). Demolishing history's dependence on the reciprocal correspondence between evidence and the "reality effect" of "objective" history, Barthes, in his seminal essay "The Discourse of History", strikes at the edifice of

history's epistemology. Although history is "justified by the principles of 'rational' exposition", argues Barthes, "does this form of narration really differ [...] from imaginary narration, as we find it in the epic, the novel, and the drama" (7)? Unsurprisingly, Barthes's "rhetorical analysis of historical narrative", observes Stephen Bann, "cannot grant to history, *a priori*, the mythic status which differentiates it from fiction" (3).

Narrative for Ricoeur is mimetic of human action. Establishing a healthy hermeneutic circle between narrative and life, he demonstrates that not only history and fiction have things in common, but are also interweaved in the narrative experiences of life: "on the one hand, history in some way makes use of fiction to refigure time and, on the other hand, fiction makes use of history for the same ends" (*Time and Narrative*, 181). While history makes intense use of the narrative tradition of emplotment, it also involves something at the level of refiguration which Ricoeur calls "the representative function of the historical imagination" (*Time and Narrative*, 186). Hence a given series of events can be observed as tragic or comic and so on which explains the equal appeal of history books as that of novels. Most importantly, history has the sanctimonious task of conveying the horror, typical of fiction, of epoch-making events. Hence the interweaving of fiction with history to form a narrative. If fiction is thus interwoven in history, then, as a corollary, history is also interwoven in fiction. "Fictional narrative", argues Ricoeur, "is quasi-historical to the extent that the unreal events that it relates are past facts for the narrative voice that addresses itself to the reader. It is in this that they resemble past events and that fiction resembles history"(*Time and Narrative*, 190). The past that the fictional world conjures is a "quasi-past", a probable past, a past that "might have been". The past, far from being a fixed monolith, is open-ended; consequently, there are multiple narratives about the same events, the same past. Persevering with this argument, Hayden White concludes that "there is no such thing as a *single* correct view of any object under study but [...] there are many correct views, each requiring its own style of representation" (47).

Literary narrative provides a new perspective of looking at the historical past, often questioning the credibility of the historical representation. By way of questioning what Hayden White calls history's tropic prefiguration, the prominence given to key historical figures, the erasure of subaltern individuals or

communities, literature foregrounds the role of narrative in constructing one's understanding of the world and meaning and truth. A postcolonial writer, in his/her critical re-interpretation of the historical archive, creates a hybrid text that combines historical evidences and imaginative reconstructions, historical as well as invented characters. With this interplay, history is stripped off its objective quality. That literary texts have been widely recognized as essential materials for historical study is evident in Spivak's endorsement of Foucault's suggestion that "to make visible the unseen can also mean a change of level, addressing oneself to a layer of material which hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognized as having any moral, aesthetic or historical value" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?", 27-28).

[I]

Amitav Ghosh's projected *Ibis* trilogy is a comprehensive historical research about the mid-nineteenth century opium wars between China and the Western powers led by Britain. The European powers, cloaking their greed by the rubrics of free trade and internationalization of commerce, attempted to open the Chinese markets to the vicious opium trade. The first book of the trilogy, *Sea of Poppies* depicts the politics of subjugation of the West and the efforts at resistance of the East in an inclusive diachronic version of history which incorporates the unheroic wretched of the earth. It chronicles the lives of a motley group of people who, after many upheavals, board the *Ibis*. The schooner, formerly a slave carrier between Africa and America, now transports indentured, colonial labourers, the girmitiyas, to new colonies. The fictional lives of these characters are embedded in the historical backdrop of the early nineteenth century colonized Indian subcontinent when the zamindari system of land ownership was imposed. While the zamindar possessed the exclusive right to collect taxes from land, the poor Indian peasant was forced to cultivate cash crops like opium instead of the staple wheat to increase the Empire's revenue. By focusing on a wide range of characters with diverse social and economic backgrounds, the narrative explores oppression at various levels. Deeti, her opium addicted husband Hukam Singh and their farming community are forced producers of poppy on their own land. By

remaining half-starved and living in a dilapidated thatched house they are compelled to provide the raw materials to the swelling lucrative opium trade of the British. Hukam Singh was a sepoy in a British regiment but lost his job because of a leg injury. He now works at the Sudder Opium Factory in Ghazipur. The narrative vividly evokes the brutal working conditions in the factory when Deeti, summoned to take home her ailing husband, visits it. She witnesses the startling spectacle of "a host of dark, legless torsos [...] circling around and around, like some enslaved tribe of demons" (*Sea of Poppies*, 94). The dehumanizing condition of the employees makes Deeti groggy:

> 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 [...]. These seated men had more the look of ghouls than any living thing she had ever seen: their eyes glowing red in the dark and they appeared completely naked. (*SP*, 95)

The white overseers who maintained discipline in the factory are "almost as frightening", armed with "fearsome instruments: metal scoops, glass ladles and long-ladled rakes" (*SP*, 95). Even children are dragged in this infernal environment and any minor offence often invites the brutal assault of the "cane-wielding overseers" on the native offender whose "howls and shrieks went echoing through the vast, chilly chamber" (*SP*, 96). Hukam Singh's prolonged illness exposes Deeti to the aggressive advances of her male in-laws. Already in the past, induced by opium, she was raped by her husband's younger brother Chandan Singh on her bridal bed. What is worse, this violent act is condoned by her husband, his uncle Subedar Bhyro Singh and her mother-in-law. With her husband's subsequent death, her land is confiscated and sheis repressed by traditional male authority. Since "the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant", the subaltern colonial widow who "has no history and cannot speak, [...] is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?",28). Marginalized and powerless, the silenced Deeti chooses to self-immolate herself on her husband's funeral pyre. Reflecting on the "voiceless, hopeless" plight of Indian women, Josephine Butler sympathetically remarks that "their helplessness appeals to the heart, in somewhat the same way in which the helplessness and suffering of a dumb animal does, under the knife of a vivisector" (cited in Burton, 144). The narrative vividly presents the barbarity of the Hindu

practice of "sati" as Deeti, "in a resplendent white sari" (*SP*, 177), is drawn towards the fire: "Half dragged and half carried, she was brought to the pyre and made to sit cross-legged on it, beside her husband's corpse. Now there was an outbreak of chanting as heaps of kindling were piled around her, and doused with ghee and oil to ready them for the fire" (*SP*, 177). Deliverance comes through transcendence. The impoverished "high-caste" Hindu widow is rescued by the gigantic untouchable Kalua whose identity is circumscribed by calcified social segregation. Kalua and Deeti's intermeshing of caste and sexuality validates their transgressive claim. A couple of years back Deeti had surreptitiously witnessed Kalua's torture and humiliation by three sport-loving landowners of Ghazipur. As he lay "unconscious in the sand, naked and smeared in dung" (*SP*, 57), Deeti "in defiance of the world's unseen presence" (*SP*, 58), nursed Kalua's wounds. Physical intimacy with this untouchable rouses her flaming passion which burns all her humanity. His powerful physique which lay "peacefully inert", "the softness of mere flesh", her awareness of his breathing, "a faint stirring and swelling" (*SP*, 58) mesmerize her with the prospect of a fulfilling sexual liaison. As the final realm of pleasure and truth, sexuality is the zone of experience where an individual achieves self-realization. Accordingly, Deeti "suddenly" wakes into a "reality" as she "sat with her hand resting intimately upon the most untouchable part of this man" (*SP*, 58-59). By asserting her biological desire for Kalua, Deeti subverts the hierarchies of class and caste. She also undermines the male tendency to dominate by initiating the sexual act. Deeti frequently revisited the scene in her memory, "sharpening the details and refreshing certain particulars" (*SP*, 59). Having given up all hope for a return to life, Kalua's rescue act provides her a "rebirth", "her next life": "she had shed the body of the old Deeti, with the burden of its karma; she had paid the price her stars had demanded of her, and was free now to create a new destiny as she willed, with whom she chose" (*SP*, 178). The two elope and marry but are haunted by fears of certain capture and inevitable death. With nowhere to go, the couple register as indentured labourers, 'girmitiyas", and board the *Ibis* to migrate to "Mareech", i.e. Mauritius.

While British colonial expansionism couples with capitalist aggrandizement to seize political powers in India, it also opens up wonderful private opportunities for native entrepreneurs. The narrative traces the dynamics of collaboration and complicity of these local capitalists. Raja Neel Rattan and his

late father reap the financial rewards for appeasing the colonizers in their business dealings. While the vast majority of Indian peasants were plunged into penury by brutal administrative machinery, the nobility lived lavishly, immersed in delicacies, wine, music and concubines. Despite their complicity, British officials like Doughty looked at these Indian elites with a sneer of disdain and described the late Raja of Rsakhali quite contemptuously: "'Rascally Roger'", "'lordly nigger'", "'Best kind of native – kept himself busy with his shrub and his nautch-girls and his tumashers'" (*SP*, 47). As for the heir, the "'little chuckeroo, [...] a right strut-noddy'" is "'no more like the old man than stink-wood is like mahogany'" (*SP*, 48). Customary of a native ruler, Neel Rattan arranges for an elaborate banquet on his budgerow for Mr. Burnham, the business magnate, and his entourage. Food does serve as a register of cultural dynamics as E.N. Anderson enunciates: "Food communicates class, ethnic group, lifestyle affiliation, and other social positions" (124). Neel Rattan's minute scrutiny of the banquet table and preparations for the occasion presents his thoroughly Anglicized sense of identity. Typical of a colonial mimic man occupying a hybrid cultural space, the Western educated native swells in pride to display not only his exotic cuisine but also his internalization of colonial culture and his allegiance to the crown. Resenting that he is "'an ignorant native'" (*SP*, 118), Neel Rattan vehemently asserts to his British guests that "'your youthful Queen has no more loyal subject than myself, and none who is more keenly aware of the rights that are enjoyed by the people of Britain'" (*SP*, 118). What is more he is thoroughly familiar with the writings of Hume, Locke and Hobbes. However, Neel Rattan's showcasing his Western etiquette and knowledge does not suggest that his Westernized "self" has supplanted his Indian identity. Later in the narrative when Neel languishes in Alipore Jail and is gradually adapts to the gruesome prison conditions, he nauseates at the meal dished out to him because it is prepared by hands of unknown caste: "The intensity of his body's resistance amazed him: for the fact was that he did not believe in caste, or so at least he had said, many, many times, to his friends and anyone else who would listen" (*SP*, 267). Neel was proud of his egalitarianism, the spirit of which was drawn both from Western liberal ideas and the Indian reformers who had battled against rigid caste divisions. But the codes of cultural hierarchies and binarisms have been so deeply embedded in Neel's psyche that they now swell up from the unconscious and catch him

unawares. Truly, ideology goes to the heart of personal identity, of how one conceives himself as subject in the world. Far from being a "set of doctrines". Ideology, believes Eagleton, "signifies the way men live out their roles in class-society, the values, ideas and images which tie them by their social functions and so prevent them from a true knowledge of society as a whole" (16-17). Neel Rattan's empirical identity is conceived as a "performance, a duty and nothing more; one of the many little enactments that were required by the demands of social existence, by samsara" (*SP*, 267). Since it is based on role-playing, it is not "real", it is "just an illusion" (*SP*, 267). The garb of his social self is now seriously threatened by his own deeply ingrained cultural matrix. The hiatus between the conscious and the unconscious selves and the compelling recognition of what is his "own" trouble his mind and shape his dreams: "That night his dreams were plagued by a vision of himself, transformed into a moulting cobra, a snake that was struggling to free itself of its outworn skin" (*SP*, 268). Despite internalizating Western philosophy and exaggeratedly imitating colonial culture, manners and tastes, he cannot strip off the traces of his own cultural legacies.

European colonialism was a lucrative politico-commercial enterprise inextricably tied with capitalism. Exploring the relationship between the ideology of imperialism and its functioning through the practice of colonialism, Denis Judd argues that "no one can doubt that the desire for profitable trade, plunder and enrichment was the primary force that led to the establishment of the imperial structure" (3). The British imperialists inculcated the specious rhetoric of free trade and the internationalization of commerce which would create wealth for all nations to shroud their mercenary motives. The British East India Company gave over the opium trade to ruthless private merchants who exported opium to China and encouraged local farmers to abandon traditional crops for poppies. Such was the revenue generated by opium trade that within a short time it became the bedrock of British rule in India. Furthermore, the most important chemicals needed for industries, modern medicines or surgeries in England were extracted from opium. The British government was in no position to stop this steady flow of profit from this commercial enterprise. Hence they refused to recognize China's anti-opium laws and intended to open up Chinese markets. The extent to which an imperialist's ethics can be corroded by his profit-making urge can be judged from the rhetoric of Mr. Burnham, a tycoon who amasses enormous wealth by opium-

trade. To conceal his greed, he laces his finely cloaked argument with a touch of ideology: "'The war, when it comes, will not be for opium. It will be for a principle: for freedom – for the freedom of trade and for the freedom of the Chinese people. Free Trade is a right conferred on Man by God, and its principles apply as much to opium as to any other article of trade'" (*SP*, 115). Tearing to shreds all conventional codes of self-defense, Burnham equates his blatant imperial expansionism with divine will: "'Jesus-Christ is Free Trade and Free Trade is Jesus Christ'" (*SP*, 116). In his influential book *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, Partha Chatterjee explains that European nationalism is "part of the same historical process which saw the rise of industrialism and democracy" and "nationalism represents the attempt to actualize in political terms the universal urge for liberty and progress" (2). There is, however, a conflict right at the heart of nationalism which Chatterjee terms the "liberal dilemma": nationalism may promise liberty and universal suffrage to the colonizers but undemocratic forms of government and domination to the colonized. The concept of the Western nations as representing the best of human civilization becomes a way of legitimating colonial expansion. A perfect illustration of the imperialist's duplicity is the ship captain Mr. Doughty's invocation of humanism to justify the war with China: "'There is no other recourse. Indeed, humanity demands it. We need only think of the poor Indian peasant – what will become of him if his opium can't be sold in China? [...] they'll perish by the crore'" (*SP*, 260). This sophistry of the colonizer to pass off imperial aggrandizement under the rubric of humanism is severely repudiated by Tony Davies who considers this equation as an "ideological smokescreen for the oppressive mystifications of modern society and culture, the marginalization and oppression of the multitudes of human beings in whose name it pretends to speak" (5). What Doughty omits from his discourse, for the sake of convenience, is the fact that it was the British themselves who imposed opium cultivation on the poor Indian peasant. That this imperial commercial operation is least bothered about official legislation is emphasized by Burnham: "'Parliament will not know of the war until it is over. [...] if such matters were left to Parliament there would *be* no Empire'" (*SP*, 118). The intricate connection between religion and imperialism to demonstrate the differences between the civilized and the barbaric native worlds comes through in Justice Kendalbushe's quasi-religious assertion that "'a war is necessary if China is to be opened up to

God's word'" (*SP*, 260). This "illusory or fraudulent pretensions" (Davies, 36) of humanism is indicted by Davies who brings in Nietzschean anti-humanism to unravel the "coercive theology that lurks inside the 'religion of humanity' and other such schemes of secular Salvationism, and the tendency of such schemes to conceal quite disreputable motivations beneath their professions of universal altruism" (36). At the other end of this powerful oppressive machinery who recoils from the specious rhetoric of the imperial demi-gods and revolts against their pretensions is Captain Chillingworth who questions the benefit of the war with China: "'I am not sure whose good you mean, theirs or ours'" (*SP*, 262). Denouncing the tenets of imperialist ideology, he confronts his superiors with the truth that they are "'no different from the Pharaohs or the Mongols: the difference is only that when we kill people we feel compelled to pretend that it is for some higher cause. It is this pretence of virtue, I promise you that will never be forgiven by history'" (*SP*, 262). Though Captain Chillingworth perpetuates imperial ideologies in his profession, he feels alienated from the empire that is oppressive and evil. His self-awakening echoes George Orwell's who felt haunted by "an intolerable sense of guilt", resenting "the dirty work of empire" and firmly convinced "that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better" (3). His new realization and paralyzing loss of freedom borders on the phenomenon of anxiety and signals an abrupt break with the continuity of exploitation, a "negation of continuity" (42) as Kierkegaard put it. While a handful of individuals like Chillingworth do not feel at home in the empire, the annexation policies of the colonial administration continue unabated. Burnham skillfully weaves an intricate web of deceit and forges documents in Neel Rattan Halder's name to dethrone him. The prince turns into a pauper and languishes in Alipore Jail; Burnham seizes control of the Raskhali estate. Neel's trial at court exposes how blatant racism vitiated even the operation of the rule of law in British India. The putative racial superiority of the British and the racial inferiority of the Indians and hence their incorrigibility justify the former's conferring of "'the benefits of civilization'" (*SP*, 235) as Justice Kendalbushe proclaims. Realizing the infamous double standard of the imperial judicial system, the helpless Neel understands that the Englishmen "Mr. Burnham and his ilk" are "exempt from the law as it applies to others: it was they who had become the

world's new Brahmins" (*SP*, 239). Imperialist politics strengthened by an unimpeachable rule of law paves the path for complete British domination.

While Deeti is marginalized by a feudal and patriarchal society and Neel Rattan is trapped by imperial deceit, Paulette is exposed to a subjugation of a different kind. Just as Deeti is ostracized from mainstream society, Paulette's widowed father, the French botanist Pierre Lambert, is occluded from the English society in Calcutta because of British snobbery and intercultural rivalry. Lambert's isolation is compounded by his iconoclasm: he denied God's existence and the sanctity of marriage. Mrs. Lambert's death at child-birth places Paulette in Jodu's mother's arms and thus her marginalized identity becomes amorphous as she meanders through the in-between spaces of cultural contact zones at times resulting in complete assimilation: "the first language she learnt was Bengali. And the first solid food she ate was a rice-and-dal khichri cooked by Jodu's mother. In the matter of clothing she far preferred saris to pinafores" (*SP*, 67). "Putli", meaning a doll, becomes the domesticated version of "Paulette", and her nurse becomes ""Tantima' – aunt-mother"" (*SP*, 66). The rich "confusion of tongues that was to characterize her upbringing" (*SP*, 66) provides her a linguistic fluidity that enables her to escape any straitjacketing within any particular cultural frame of reference. Pertinent to the issue is Raymond Hickey's observation that "nativeness is not a question of choice or assessment by others, but a result of early language acquisition" (507). The freedom which Paulette enjoys as a "native", signified by her bare feet roaming, is curbed when the Burnhams decide to adopt and "civilize" her. "Colonialism minus a civilizational mission" asserts Ashis Nandy, "is no colonialism at all" (11). The Burnhams attempt to acculturate Paulette by urging her to accept British social and domestic norms and cognitive categories. Their strong disregard for botany forbids Paulette to instruct the Burnhams' daughter Annabel in botany, philosophy or Latin. "Self-appointed moral guardians of society declared" observes Patricia Fara, "that they wanted to protect young women from the corrupting influence of botanical education" (12). Nowhere is the Burnham's civilizing zeal more vigorous than in the religious domain. What they vehemently demand of Paulette is "regular churchgoing, good behaviour and a willingness to open herself to religious instruction" (*SP*, 130). By imposing Biblical sermons on the poor girl, Burnham establishes British supremacism and the cultural inferiority of the "Other". Richard Congreve, Bishop of Oxford,

believed that "God has entrusted India to us to hold it for him, and we have no right to give it up" (cited in Rao, 26). That the British strongly believed that they were performing a divine mission and that the Bible was well manipulated for imperial missions is neatly summed up by Nicholas B. Dirks:

> Indeed, by the late nineteenth century, Christian triumphalism was folded into a new kind of imperial nationalism, in which the rule of the world by Britain was sanctioned both by history and faith. [...] Missionary rhetoric was used to celebrate the accomplishments of empire rather than the message of Christ. (76)

Consequently "colonialism encouraged the colonizers to impute to themselves magical feelings of omnipotence and permanence" (Nandy, 35). Such is Burnham's desire to structure Paulette's consciousness and determine the parameters of her existence that he forces her to marry the widowed Justice Kendalbushe. But despite Kendalbushe's intense desire to marry her and Mrs. Burnham's reiterations that marrying him would be "'a prodigious stroke of kismet'" (*SP*, 273), Paulette refuses the proposal where her sentiments are not involved. Rejecting the bliss of domesticity and material comfort she decides to determine her own destiny. Inspired by her botanist grand-aunt Madame Commerson who travelled all round the world in male disguise, Paulette flees the ideological trappings of the Burnhams and, helped by Baboo Nob Kissin's improvisations, boards the *Ibis*. Disguised as a "*bamni*, a Brahman's daughter" (*SP*, 355-356) she soon establishes a deep communion with the other women on board and proves that Jodu's and Zachary's doubts about her ability to endure the strains of a marine journey were only misgivings. Such is Paulette's skill in the acts of masquerading that Zachary wonders that she has "so perfected the arts of impersonation" that they have become "the core" of her "soul" (*SP*, 500-501). Paulette has surreptitiously penetrated into Zachary's closely guarded secret that he is a "black" American, a "mulatto", and is convinced that in terms of "the multiplicity of [...] selves" (*SP*, 443) they are on the same register. She thrusts at Zachary her profound realization that despite the fragmentary pluralism of one's empirical being there is an underlying unifying substratum: "'Whatever there is within us – whether good, or bad, or neither – its existence will continue uninterrupted, will it not, no matter what the drape of our clothes, or the colour of our skin?'" (*SP*,501). Paulette's enunciation celebrates the unity beneath a plethora of selves and deviates from the poststructural contention that identity is

nomadic, endlessly wandering or deferred. Her contention has its philosophical grounding in Schopenhauer's validation of the *will* which gives "unity and sequence to consciousness" (139), which "alone is unalterable and absolutely identical, and has brought forth consciousness for its own ends. It is therefore the will that gives its unity and holds all its representations and ideas together, accompanying them, as it were, like a continuous ground-bass" (140). Furthermore, "it is *the will* alone that is permanent and unchangeable in consciousness, [...] the true and ultimate point of unity of consciousness, and the bond of all its functions and acts" (140). Thus assured of her own being she interrogates Neel Rattan whether it is "forbidden for a human being to manifest themselves in many different aspects" (*SP*, 497). Paulette's reworking of the binarism between the self and the other enables her to enter into an inter-racial, inter-religious "siblingship" (*SP*, 381) with Jodu and inter-cultural exchange of hearts with Zachary. Transcending all barriers she creates a reciprocal relationship with her fellow travelers on the *Ibis* and "in a tone of unalloyed certainty" dissolves the self's alienation from the other: "'On a boat of pilgrims, no one can lose caste and everyone is the same: it's like taking a boat to the temple of Jagannath, in Puri. From now on, and forever afterwards, we will all be ship-siblings – *jaház-bhais* and *jaház-bahens* – to each other. There'll be no differences between us'" (*SP*, 356). Paulette's rhetoric of communitarianism is based on an "understanding of subjectivity, one that values mutial dependency, reliance, appreciation, and trust between the Self and the Other" (Lin, 11). This indeed is a "paradigmatic reconsideration of the status of the Other in our understanding of who we are – our self, identity, and individuality" (Lin, 1). The self's being "with" the other is an integral part of the ethical relationship with the other. This "'withness'", conceptualizes Margaret Chatterjee, "covers up the essential difference that there is between people, although we are endowed with the capacity of bridging that distance by embarking on the project of being 'towards' the other" (220).

Zachary Reid, the *Ibis*'s second mata and a "mulatto" from Boston, displays like Paulette multiple identities to conceal his authentic self. The son of a Maryland freedwoman, Zachary suppresses his mixed parentage from his British employees fearing discrimination. His ambiguous racial status dissolves the barriers between the Western naval officers and the subaltern lascars. Such is

Zachary's bonhomie with the lascar leader Serang Ali that he feels startled at the "unaccustomed ease" in which he communicates with them in their pidgin language "as if his oddly patterned speech had unloosed his own tongue" (*SP*, 16). An adept sailor and an experienced man of the world, Serang Ali emphasizes the importance of performance in business transactions to the greenhorn Zachary. This reminds the reader of the relation between Saya John and Rajkumar in *The Glass Palace*. Serang Ali transforms Zachary's identity to such an extent that the latter occupies a hybrid cultural space beyond recognition. Serang Ali insists that Zachary must wear "'propa clothes'" to be "'one big piece pukka sahib'" (*SP*, 50) to unsettle the structure of colonial dominance. The hybrid identity of the colonial mimic man "as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 86) is, in Bhabha's thinking, a mode of anti-colonial resistance because it not only "ruptures" the entire colonial discourse but also "becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence" (86). As an "incomplete" and "virtual" (86) imitation, mimicry is a play between equivalence and excess and hence both reassuringly similar and terrifying, "resemblance and menace" (86). Zachary realized that his performance of a Westernized colonial identity, as a "'Free Mariner'" meant so much to the serang: "For Serang Ali and his men Zachary was almost one of themselves, while yet being endowed with the power to undertake an impersonation that was unthinkable for any of them; it was as much for their own sakes as for his that they wanted to see him succeed" (*SP*, 50). Furthermore, the old serang looks up to Zachary as a substitute for his deceased son-in-law Adam Danby and pours all his affections on the "mulatto". Such is the intimate attachment between the old lascar and the young mate that the strange assortment of peculiar words which forms the lascari language can never be an obstacle in their relationship. In fact, "beneath the surface of this farrago of sound", their emotions "flowed as freely as the currents beneath the crowded press of boats" (*SP*, 104). Disrespecting all racial and cultural boundaries, Zachary strongly endorses the principle of posthumanism which enables "two people from worlds apart to find themselves linked by a tie of pure sympathy, a feeling that owed nothing to the rules and expectations of others" (*SP*, 439). It is this empathic bond between the self and the other which impels Zachary and Jodu to rescue each other when in distress in the waters. His

ambiguous inter-racial position enables him to understand Paulette's predicament much better than anybody else, an understanding that gradually matures into love.

The relationship between the self and the other is a fluid one which takes on various dimensions according to the peculiarity of the circumstances. Far from being reduced into a passive target of scrutiny, the self and the other enter into a reciprocal relationship as active agents. This open-ended dialogue is exemplified in the aristocrat Neel's conversion of the chronic opium addict Ah Fatt in prison and their subsequent intimacy. The fastidious Neel was very conscious about the purity of his "body" that "bordered almost on the occult" (*SP*, 198). He inherited this strict observance of the rituals of cleanliness and purification from his mother "for whom bodily defilement was a preoccupation that permitted neither peace nor rest" (*SP*, 199). Given to cleanse his "dribbling, leaking, spewing cell-mate" (*SP*, 322), Neel is initially reluctant to part with his ingrained convictions but by being open and responsive to the loathsome Ah Fatt he "could feel the intimations of an irreversible alteration" (*SP*, 323). Alterity, i.e. the unknowable and unreachable nature of the other, cannot be attained, but it can be approached and negotiated. Admittedly, to "know the other is both to discover the other and to discover the self" (Margaret Chatterjee, 222): "In a way, he was none other than the man he had ever been, Neel Rattan Halder, but he was different too" (*SP*, 323). The more Neel knows Ah Fatt through physical intimacy the more he learns to treat him as a person possessing value, an end in himself. The act of generosity designates to the other a world which was hitherto the self's sole possession. "The loss of the world of the self", contends Doukhan in analyzing Levinas's philosophy, "thus gives rise to a hospitality of the other within that world. The self's exile allows for a welcoming of the other" (243). This welcoming stance generates a profound sense of transcendence and erases all possible difference between the self and the other: "Having spent a few days in the same space, Neel had already begun to feel that he was somehow implicated in his cell-mate's plight: it was as if their common destination had made their shame and honour a shared burden" (*SP*, 325). Thus through generosity the world of the self widens to welcome the dimension of the other; the self's homeland has become a haven for the other, "subjectivity" is presented "as welcoming the Other, as hospitality" (Levinas, 27). This initiates Neel's profound empathic bond with Ah Fatt which is further intensified when he listens captivated to Ah Fat's life-story. In a self-reflexive stance the narrator

muses on the impact of the narrative on its audience and the latter's engagement with it as Neel is captivated by Ah Fatt's recollections of his life in Canton:

> It was not because of Ah Fatt's fluency that Neel's vision of Canton became so vivid as to make it real: in fact, the opposite was true, for the genius of Ah Fatt's descriptions lay in their elisions, so that to listen to him was a venture of collaboration, in which the things that were spoken of came gradually to be transformed into artefacts of shared imagining. (*SP*, 375)

The act of interpretation demands the reader's active participation because it is he who excavates the gaps and silences in the narrative. For Tabish Khair reading is "an act of digging" (15) and identifying the "superfluous omissions and not-meant-to-be-noticed silences" (14) in the text. Far from being a passive receptor, the reader is an active co-creator and interpreter who not only "stays on the surface of the text", but is "an active thinker and interpreter. She attends to the text, but she also accomplishes and takes charge to an extent" (15). Neel is very much the active collaborator the narrator wants his readers to be.

The huddling together of a varied cast of characters on the Ibis allows the narrative the space to explore the processes of identity formation. "There are two meanings of the word 'subject'", believes Foucault, "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to one's own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" ("The Subject and Power", 212). The "I" is subject to forces and effects both within and without, subject to others "by control or dependence" (212) from even before his/her birth. Being a subject has specifically to do with language: "You cannot be an 'I' without having a proper name [...]. We are born into language, we are born – more precisely –into patriarchal language, into being identified by a patronym, by a paternal proper name" (Bennett and Royle, 126). The chameleonic Paulette's multifaceted identity is signified by the various names by which she is known – Putli, Puggly and finally Putleshwari on the *Ibis*. As argued earlier, she is compelled by social circumstances to don on new avatars and by sequences of elisions and transformations her subjectivity is always in the making and remaking. Toril Moi notes that Beauvoir's central thesis in *The Second Sex* is that "'[o]ne is not born a woman; one becomes one'" (92). Paulette's multilayered identity validates Catherine Belsey's notion of "cultural construction of identity" (593) and her focus on "process" and possibilities for change therein: "The subject [...] is the site of contradiction, and is consequently

perpetually in the process of construction, thrown into crisis by alterations in language and in the social formation, capable of change. And in the fact that the subject is a *process* lies the possibility of transformation" (597). Incidentally, it is in the course of her role-playing that Paulette realizes that notwithstanding the fragmented, fluid nature of her social self she cannot disengage herself from what is deeply embedded in her:

> Now, watching the familiar foliage slip by, Paulette's eyes filled with tears: these were more than plants to her, they were the companions of her earliest childhood and their shoots seemed almost to be her own, plunged deep into this soil; no matter where she went or for how long, she knew that nothing would ever tie her to a place as did these childhood roots. (*SP*, 381)

Evidently, while the empirical subject is always in a process of becoming, it is the substrate that stands as the permanent background of one's being.

A victim of a patriarchal and feudal society, subjugated by caste divisions, the repressed Deeti is forced to leave her daughter behind and flees with Kalua. She is the Other relegated to "sad necessities of signification" (Butler, 174) by the "violence of exclusion" (Butler, 174). A mute sufferer on land, Deeti's rhetoric of resistance is audible on board when she demands the venerable rites for a deceased coppersmith from Ballia and not "throw him away like the skin of a peeled onion": "Just a little *izzat*; some respect [...] it's not right to treat us like this" (*SP*, 414). Deeti's graduation to a defiant rebel to reclaim the dignity of a dead man unifies the girmitiyas against the oppressive crew who confer upon her the title "Bhauji": "it was as if she had been appointed the matron of the dabusa by common consent" (*SP*, 430). Earlier, of course, Deeti introduced herself to the women on board as "Aditi" which was "her proper, given name" (*SP*, 233). Kalua's swapping of his father's name with his own fashions his new identity which is the result of an error in spelling on the authority's part: "Maddow Colver". One does not choose but is endowed with a forename and Kalua's repeating his new given name highlights the way in which one is *subject* to names. The name which at first seemed to belong to someone else, "a person other than himself" (*SP*, 284), ceases to be unfamiliar after repetitions: "it was as much his own now as his skin, or his eyes, or his hair – Maddow Colver" (*SP*, 284). What it signifies is the idea that questions of personal or individual identity are indissociably bound up with language even if in Kalua's case his new name is "the

result of the stumbling tongue of a harried gomusta, and the faulty hearing of an English pilot who was a little more than half-seas over" (*SP*, 285). Ghosh demonstrates the poststructural contention that the human subject is necessarily decentered as well as reveals the pivotal role of the substratum thereby straddling both currents of thought.

Despite their feeling of commonality, the female immigrants on board get a sense of their distinctive identity through the stories they tell about themselves. The catalogue of subaltern tales that Ghosh ascribes to these Third World women is a record of their wretched lives on land – Munia's immature amorous experiences and the destruction of their family, the tortures and abuses of Dookhanee's oppressive mother-in-law, the two sisters Ratna and Champa's starvation after their husbands' lands were seized by the opium factory, Heeru's desertion by her husband. Each narrative not only crafts a self but by being located in a material world also explores the socio-economic matrices that govern their lives. The interplay between experience and expression is a dynamic one. It is grounded in the phenomenological assumption that entities are given meaning through being experienced and the idea that narrative is a vital resource to bring experiences to conscious awareness. The recollection of experiences through references to significant places in their lives – "the great cattle mela of Sonepur" (*SP*, 242), the poppy fields in Ghazipur –evoke for the listeners particular times and circumstances. As a narrative is apprehended, it gives rise to the selves that apprehend them. "Narrative is radical", believes Toni Morrison, "creating us at the very moment it is being created" (cited in Blair, 11). As it reaches out to tap a pre-existing identity, the narrative constructs a "fluid, evolving identity in the making":

> Spinning out their telling through choice of words, degree of elaboration, attribution of causality and sequentiality, and the foregrounding and backgrounding of emotions, circumstances, and behaviour, narrators build novel understandings of themselves-in-the world. In this manner, selves evolve in the time frame of a single telling as well as in the course of the many tellings that eventually compose a life." (Ochs and Capps, 23)

The story of Heeru's separation from her husband was "told so many times that they all felt as though they had lived through it themselves" (*SP*, 242). Being discursive constructions of the past, these narratives are symbolic strategies of addressing their present predicament. Stories negotiate the past and its meaning

and also seek ways of moving forward. They elucidate a community's understanding of itself. What is more, the act of narration invites the listener into a "matrice of ideas" (Merleau-Ponty, 77) beyond his own sedimented notions of self. Ah Fatt's graphic presentation of his past to Neel invites Neel to "a venture of collaboration", an act of "a shared imagining" (*SP*, 375): "In listening and prompting, Neel began to feel that he could almost see with Ah Fatt's eyes: there it was, the city that conceived and nurtured this new half of himself" (*SP*, 375-376). The world of the text and the world of the reader interpenetrate each other through a "fusion of horizons", through "refiguration": the "active re-organization of our being-in-the-world performed by the reader following the invitation of the text to become the reader of ourself" (Ricoeur, "Intellectual Autobiography",47). Reminiscent of Ricoeur's constant reference to Gadamer's "fusion of horizons", Merleau-Ponty asserts that narrative/narration carries "the speaker and hearer into a common universe by drawing both toward a new signification through their power to designate in excess of their accepted definition" (75). Narration, emplotment, reading/listening is, therefore, mediums in quest for an answer to the elusive question "Who am I?"

If the rhetoric of posthumanism and narratology resolve the binarism between the Self and the Other, their animosity is revealed in the brutal torture of the immigrants by the English mates and their Indian henchmen. To consolidate the colonial regime, The British realized the vital importance of the anthropologization of colonial knowledge to understand and control its subjects, and to represent and legitimate its own mission. Ethnographic knowledge could enable the colonial administrative machinery to devise "new ways to claim the loyalty of subjects on the basis of custom and culture, and [...] to delineate the autonomous and proper domains of religion and custom" (Dirks, 77). The British first mate Crowle explicitly states this intricate policy of domination to Zachary when he protects against the natives' physical torture:

> [...] there is an unspoken pact between the white man and the natives who sustains his power in Hindoosthan – it is that in matters of marriage and procreation, like must be with like, and each must keep to their own, The day the natives lose faith in us, as the guarantors of the order of castes – that will be the day, gentlemen, that will doom our rule. This is the inviolable principle on which our authority is based. (*SP*, 482)

When the budding romance between Jodu, the Muslim lascar and Munia, a Hindu indentured labourer is detected, Crowle connives with the subedar Bhyro Singh to inflict flogging on the poor young lascar to reduce him to a "carcass" (*SP*, 471). Things get worse when to settle an old personal grudge against the low-caste Kalua, Bhyro Singh has him imprisoned and sadistically enjoys the spectacle of Kalua's whipping unto death. Kalua is flogged on the deck and all the migrants are forced to witness his execution to "share in the experience of the pain" (*SP*, 486). What they enjoy is the rise of a native agonist against the combined powers of imperialism and native feudalism. The blood smeared Kalua, calculating the drumbeat and the subedar's paces of the whip-lash, makes such a sudden improvisation, that the whip coils around Bhyro Singh's neck and he lies dead on the deck. The victim emerges victorious, momentarily though, as Crowle soon announces Kalua's death sentence.

Zachary's mettle as an individual is severely tested when the first mate and his adversary Crowle confronts him with his closely guarded racial identity. Armed with the crew-list of the *Ibis*, Crowle tries to blackmail Zachary and rope him in his desire to overthrow Chillingworth and supplant him as the ship's captain. Zachary has been a persistent critic of Crowle's malicious designs against the native immigrants and the crew all through but now the ground seems to slip beneath his feet since he feels "amazed to think that something so slight, so innocuous could be invested with so much authority" (*SP*, 508). Unfazed in this critical juncture, Zachary holds on to his integrity and challenges the imposing first mate: "'I'm sorry but this deal o' yours won't work for me. It may look to you that this piece of paper has turned me inside out, but in truth it's changed nothing. I was born with my freedom and I ain't looking to give any o' it away'" (*SP*, 508). Crowle has uncovered Zachary's racial identity, Zachary knows his anarchic motives. When Crowle attempts to finish Zachary off, he is brutally stabbed by the half-Chinese convict Ah Fatt. The opium-addict convict not only avenges his humiliation at the hands of Crowle but also restores Neel's faith in him as a resurgent individual. Ah Fatt's Indian father Bahram insisted his son to learn boxing because he wanted him to learn things that an Englishman must know. Bahram's emphasis on physicality seems to stem from his celebration of "Ksatriyahood as true Indianness" and his nationalistic zeal to "beat the colonizers at their own game and to regain self-esteem as Indians" (Nandy, 52). Physically

effete throughout the novel, Ah Fatt asserts his individuality at the end by eliminating the British First Mate. The four convicts – Jodu, Neel, Ah Fatt and Kalua – escape in a boat steered by Serang Ali. They are criminals in the eyes of the law but when judged within the framework of personal accountability each is a transgressor asserting his individuality. By taking into account not only the hard facts but also exploring the emotions, thoughts and actions of these seemingly ordinary individuals Ghosh weaves an inclusive historical narrative, an imaginative microhistory which lies embedded in the macrohistory of the imperial project. Evidently what Ghosh tries to reconcile are the "analytical" histories utilizing the rational categories of modern historical thought and the "affective" histories which account for the plural ways of being-in-the-world. After all, history and fiction, as modes of narrative, mediate "the world for the purpose of introducing meaning" (E.L. Doctorow, cited in Hutcheon, 112).

[II]

Sea of Poppies ends with the escape of the convicts from the *Ibis* which is in the grip of a fierce cyclone in the Bay of Bengal. *River of Smoke* begins in the wind-swept cliffs of Mauritius with "La Fami Colver", Deeti's clan, marching in ritual procession to her "Memory Temple". The repressed, exploited young woman from a remote Indian village establishes a matrilineal community in Mauritius after serving out her indenture along with eight of her shipmates. With the creation of an indentured community of "ship-siblings from the *Ibis*" (*RS*, 11), culture flows between national boundaries undermining the modern narrative of a homogeneous nation. A product of this intercultural negotiation is the "strange mixture of Bhojpuri and Kreol" that becomes Deeti's "personal idiom of expression" (*RS*, 4). Hybridity and fluidity of movement thus lead to the rise of a global imaginary characterized by heterogeneity as the nation becomes an open cultural site.

Deeti's semi-mystical experience interweaves the beginning of both *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*. In the first novel, she has an instinctive foreknowledge that her vision of a tall-masted ship on the ocean is a "sign of destiny" (*SP*, 3). In the sequel, she insists that it was not chance but destiny that

led her to the site of her hidden shrine in Mauritius. Deeti's prescient drawing of the *Ibis* on a green mango leaf amazes her daughter Kabutri and even puzzles herself with the "sureness of her intuition" (*SP*, 9). Her sketch is so authentic that the narrator comments in a proleptic aside that "[l]ater, even seasoned sailors would admit that her drawing was an uncannily evocative rendition of its subject" (*SP*, 10). The unlettered Deeti transcends the "island boundaries of the individual" and enters into a "symbiotic communion with [...] some higher entity, real or imaginary, of which the self is felt to be a part" (Koestler, 119-120). This explains Deeti's extra-sensory perception, "a condition which Piaget called 'proto-plasmic' or 'symbiotic' consciousness, and which may be at the origin of that 'oceanic feeling' which the artist and the mystic strive to recapture on a higher level of development, at a higher turn of the spiral" (Koestler, 120). Significantly Deeti's creation of her private universe takes place in the inner sanctum of her puja room. Her pursuit of art reaches its high point in Mauritius where she paints the walls of the cavern later known as "Deetiji's 'Memory-Temple' – *Deetiji-ka-smriti-mandir*" (*River of Smoke*, 8). Deeti thus continues the indigenous traditions of art she learned from her grandmother in her native village Madhubani, famous for its gorgeously painted walls and decorations. Unrepressed by her patriarchal in-laws, she relentlessly pursued her art in her inner shrine, her private domain. In Mauritius too, she had carved out her "'puja room'", "a small hollow in the rock, hidden away at the back" (*RS*, 7). The members of Deeti's indentured community dispersed within the island and abroad would mobilize once in a year to make elaborate preparations for their annual pilgrimage to Deeti's Memory Temple. This Temple becomes a cultural strategy of identity formation. Robbed of a past, a history, a culture, the descendants of Deeti's clan have developed a culture that draws its energy from displacement, heterogeneity, syncreticity. The saga of the patriarch Kalua's deliverance from the *Ibis*, given a mythical dimension by Deeti's paintings, is an event oft recounted by the Colver clan. This narrative is to them what "the story of the watchful geese was to ancient Rome – an instance when Fate had conspired with Nature to give them a sign that theirs was no ordinary destiny" (*RS*, 13). This "*prophetic vision of the past*" (Ashcroft, "Globalization, the Transnation and Utopia", 17, italics original) which through repetition becomes a part of everyday life is a strategic attempt to trace the origins of the family's history and to recover some pure cultural identity. It is also

designed to resist the master discourse of imperial History. The mode of this resistance is the operation of "productive memory" because "memory circumvents the striated space of history and reinfuses the present with a sense of potentiality" (Ashcroft, "Globalization, the Transnation and Utopia", 17). Deeti's uninterrupted pursuit of her art in a foreign space illustrates Ghosh's non-normative concept of the South Asian Diaspora which is oriented around an ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations. Furthermore, Deeti's experience accords well with Cliford's observations that "women in diaspora remain attached to, and empowered by, a 'home' culture and a tradition" (*Routes*, 259). For Deeti, drawing is her "principal means of remembrance: being unlettered, it was the only way she could keep track of her memories" (*RS*, 10). Ashcroft's observations on "the productive and significatory operation of memory" are pertinent to the context: "Memory is that medium in which utopia can either dissolve into nostalgia or become the mode of transformation." Moreover, memory is "the smooth space that flows through and around the striated space of history, the space of a nation state and all structures of fixed identity" ("Globalization, the Transnation and Utopia", 22). Deeti thus carves out her own strategies of survival in an alien land as culture becomes transnational.

The architecture of Deeti's temple resembles the architecture of the World Mountain. The inner core, the ur-temple, the ultimate darkness is the anonymous region of the subconscious, the amoral primal forces. The external world of the ego, of consciousness and history is connected by the "narrow", "tilted fissure" (*RS*, 7). In her unwavering quest to create her private universe, Deeti transforms the caverns scattered with "ossified human dung, rendered odourless by age" (*RS*, 12) into a realm of beauty and congeniality. Stimulated by the creative inspiration, Deeti breaks through the barriers of the insulated, separative ego, and ventures out into the boundless collective unconscious which explains her mystical trance on the *Ibis*. In a moment of self-transcendence, she develops the superhuman capacity to detach the spirit from the flesh and hence asserts that "the winds had lofted her to a height from which she could look down and observe all that was happening below – not in fear and panic, but in unruffled calm" (*RS*, 16). As her imagination leads her along unsuspected ways, she bears Iris Murdoch's thesis out: "Love of beauty and desire to create inspire us to activities which increase our grasp of the real" (59). Naturally, Deeti is privileged to look beyond phenomena

into the noumenon which underlies her claim that "the tufaan had chosen her to be its confidante, freezing the passage of time, and lending her the vision of its own eye" (*RS*, 16). From the vantage point of her non-empirical self she surveys the world around her and transcripts that into art. The state of instinctive seizure in which she could exist and enjoy the essence of things seemed to bring about in her "a curious Time-shift" so that she appeared to herself "to stand and stare at them in some timeless region" (Priestley, 287). Coming down to the empirical plane, Deeti can conjecture that her extra-sensory perception lasted for "a matter of a few seconds" (*RS*, 17). Deeti's assertion and her revelation in her painting that the storm which befell the *Ibis* was "wrapped around an eye" (*RS*, 20) predates the scientist's discovery that hurricanes can be created by winds rotating round a still centre or an "eye". For Neel it was a mystery that how could it be possible then that Deeti, "an illiterate, frightened young woman, had been granted this insight? And that too at a time when only a handful of the world's most advanced scientists knew of it" (*RS*, 21)? Deeti thus belongs to the elusive band of initiates in Ghosh's oeuvre – Shombhu Debnath in *The Circle of Reason*, Mangala in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Fokir in *The Hungry Tide* – who with their extra-sensory perceptions erode Enlightenment's empirical rationalism.

Sea of Poppies focuses on the transportation of Indian indentured labourers to Mauritius and exposes imperial machinations to wrest control of Indian economy. *River of Smoke* traces the complex chain of events leading to the outbreak of the Opium War in 1839 between China and England. The immoral trading practices of the West in general and the British in particular bred deceit, hypocrisy, and exploitation. The rhetoric of the democratizing powers of Free Trade under the pretext of which they carried out their nefarious activities animates *River of Smoke* as it did in its prequel. The extent to which Britain's illicit opium trade with China served as British colonialism's financial engine is evident from the Chamber of Commerce's influential member John Slade's observation that the Empire "'reaps an annual revenue of five million pounds and involves the most vital interests of the mercantile, manufacturing, shipping and maritime interests of the United Kingdom'" (*RS*, 517). Not unsurprisingly, in the several consecutive meetings of the foreign opium merchants, English entrepreneurs pass themselves off as "crusaders in the cause of Free Trade" (*RS*, 244). Like Captain Chillingworth in the first part, Mr. Charles King, "one of the

few true Christians" (*RS*, 219), is disillusioned with this vicious opium trade and exposes the Britishers' duplicity. Though they endlessly affirm to bring Freedom and Religion to China, they resort to "the most absurd subterfuges" (*RS*, 354) which breed corruption as hundreds of Chinese officials are bribed to safeguard the safe passage of opium. When he urged in a public resolution to refrain from a trade that is "fraught with evils, commercial, political, social and moral" and desires to establish "true Christian amelioration" (*RS*, 387), his plea is instantly rejected. The European belief that free trade and the internationalisation of commerce would create wealth for all nations and produce a new peaceful world order is contested by the Chinese authority which reject the idea that trade could elevate human society. The newly appointed Commissioner of Canton Lin Zexu surprises foreign merchants by announcing that the opium trade was over and orders them to surrender their stock. Consequently, a "good" and "honest" Commissioner, the "best officer in country" (*RS*, 267), "an incorruptible public servant [...] a scholar and an intellectual" (*RS*, 424) is disparaged by the British as a "madman or monster", who with the ordering of two executions has "scant regard for human life"(*RS*, 463). The unfazed Lin demands the protesting British to hand over the prominent opium trader Lancelot Dent. In a calculated move, Captain Elliot, the crown official appointed to look after British interests in Canton, decides to concede to Lin's emphatic ways. Sooner than later, the British decide to assemble expeditionary forces on the Chinese shores to open up Chinese markets to opium trade. Defying the dictates of the Chinese Emperor, the British attempt to conceal their greed in a nicely cloaked evangelical language: "It is the work of another, invisible, omnipotent: it is the hand of freedom, of the market, of the spirit of liberty itself, which is none other than the breath of God" (*RS*, 463). The war between China and Britain that this opium trade ignites does not simply stem from cultural difference or conflicting claims over territory but from the capitalist ideology of the realpolitik. The sovereign thinking of a third-world nation is dissolved into some ubiquitous yet absolutist space of empire and the invisible hand of some supra-state or super capital.

The problem of the Chinese administration is further complicated by the complicit involvement of Indian and Chinese merchants profiteering from British imperialism. The narrative traces the rags-to-riches success story of one such collaborator, the Parsi Bahram Modi, sympathises with his professional struggles

and personal dilemmas and his sad demise. Goaded by his struggle for one-upmanship with his in-laws, Bahram establishes one of the largest and most consistent profitable export divisions in Bombay and resists the British monopoly of opium business in India. An ordinary Parsi boy with no prospects for advancement, Bahram's fortunes open up when the foremost Parsi businessmen of the city Seth Rustomjee Pestonjee Mistrie is compelled by circumstances to marry his daughter Shireenbai with Bahram. The "penniless provincial" (*RS*, 49) is looked upon by his in-laws as an intruder who aimed to dispossess them off their inheritance. Eager to climb up the ladder and quit his rustic background, the ambitious Bahram, fully aware of the latest openings in trade, persuades his father-in-law to depart from the firm's practices and begins to export opium illegally to China. The calculative Bahram knew quite well that the export trade between western India and China was steadily on the rise and offered all kinds of opportunities, "not just of profit but also of travels, escape and excitement" (*RS*, 50). Far from acknowledging his unscrupulous nature, he feels pride in his clever opportunism which his father-in-law failed to take up thereby ruining his business. As for him, Bahram's entrepreneurial success provides him an honourable entry into the English dominated Chamber of Commerce which makes him swell in "proprietorial pride" because "after all these years it still thrilled him to think that he was as much a part of this scene as any foreigner could ever hope to be" (*RS*, 231). In the beginning of the narrative, Bahram's ship the *Anahita*, financed by his in-laws, carries not only "the most expensive cargo that Bahram had ever shipped" but also "possibly the single most valuable cargo that had ever been carried out of the Indian subcontinent" (*RS*, 45). A businessman of "exceptional ability and vision", "a kind of genius" (*RS*, 224), Bahram is confident that in spite of the Chinese Emperor's edicts prohibiting opium trade the "Mandarins will not tolerate any change – or else where they will get cumshaw? [...] Those bahn-chahts are the biggest smokers of all" (*RS*, 230). His knowledge about the Chinese demand for opium makes him assert to Napoleon that although it is "in principle a clandestine race", it is "difficult to put an end to it for many officials, petty and grand, benefit from it" which makes them "find ways around the laws" (*RS*, 174). Even the British merchants attribute the overwhelming success of the trade to the "marvellous degree of imbecility, avarice, conceit, and obstinacy" (*RS*, 420) of the Chinese race. That this discourse smells of Western arrogance is hinted at by none

other than Napoleon himself when he prophetically states that "[w]hat an irony it would be if it were the opium that stirred China from her sleep" (*RS*, 174).

Bahram's frequent travels from Bombay to Canton provide the narrative the opportunity to explore the in-between spaces, the Derridean interstices, through which an individual crosses the borders between ethnicity and transnationality. For Parsis in the Indian diaspora, the fact of being a Parsi Zoroastrian marks his/her racial and religious identity followed by the nationalist and the wider transnational identities. Far from cancelling each other out, in Bahram's case, they complement one another. Since too much focus on ethnicity leads to fetishisation and essentialisation of identity, the mobile, hybrid Parsi self operates in ever-widening circles of being and belonging: "Where it concerned matters of belief Parsis had clung faithfully to the old ways, [...] but in other respects thay had borrowed freely from the customs and usages of their neighbours" (*RS*, 170). When he meets Napoleon Bahram's "adaptation in outward appearance" is balanced by "the preservation of an inner distinctiveness" (*RS*, 170) which enables him to extol the teachings of the prophet Zarathrustra. Bahram thus resolves the dialectic of the home and the world as enunciated by Partha Chatterjee: "The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity" (*The Nation and its Fragments*, 120). Resolving the conflicting spaces of the home and the world within his self, Bahram retains the spiritual distinctiveness of his culture and can make all the "compromises and adjustments necessary to adapt [...] to the requirements of a modern world" (Chatterjee, 120) without losing his true identity. In the alien space of the Manchu Empire, however, Bahram discovers his alter ego: "In Canton, stripped of the multiple wrappings of home, family, community, obligation and decorum, Bahram had experienced the emergence of a new persona one that had been previously dormant within him: he had become Barry Moddie" (*RS*, 52). The name of an individual connotes his fixity in family, nation and ethnicity. "The Name", observes Ashcroft, "stands for the illusion of an irreducible identity that locates *this particular* subject, *this particular* subjectivity and no other" ("Globalization, the Transnation and Utopia", 21). The absence of a name or the renaming of a diasporic subject is "the point of potentiality" at which he can be recognized as "cut adrift, absent from the nation or launched into the possibility of new life" (Ashcroft, "Globalization, the

Transnation and Utopia", 20). While Barrie Moddie is "confident, forceful, gregarious, hospitable, boisterous and enormously successful" in Canton, when he returns to Bombay his "other" self would be shrouded and "Barry would become Bahram again, a quietly devoted husband, living uncomplainingly within the constraints of a large joint family" (*RS*, 52). Bahram's multiple subject positions aptly demonstrate Amartya Sen's contention that "identities are robustly plural, and that the importance of one identity need not obliterate the importance of others". Furthermore, an individual has to make choices about "what relative importance to attach, in a particular context, to the divergent loyalties and priorities that may compete for precedence" (18). Ghosh thus veers away from the postmodern stance that identity is nomadic, endlessly wandering or deferred. He seems to be more at home with Stuart Hall's idea that positioning is central to any idea of identity which is "not necessarily armour-plated against other identities" not "wholly defined by exclusion" ("Minimal Selves", 46), and endorses the idea of "'unities'-in-difference" ("Minimal Selves", 45).

While the "shy, retiring", "dutiful" yet "unenthusiastic" (*RS*, 48) widow-like demeanour of Bahram's legal wife Shireenbai constricted his emotions, his endearing "lob-pidgin" (74) sessions with the widowed boat-girl Chi-mei opens up a new dimension in his personality. Their illicit romance transcends ethnic, linguistic, cultural and national boundaries. Bahram's emotional attachments with Chi-mei and their only son Ah Fatt alias Freddy are much stronger than his family in India. At the beginning of the narrative, Bahram is distraught by the news of Chi Mei's death and their son's disappearance. When destiny brings Freddy back to Bahram's life, the "spontaneous and affectionate" (*RS*, 143) father reinvents his being: "It was as though he were living, for the first time, the life he aspired to – in which he was a patriarch in his own right, passing on his wisdom and experience to his son" (*RS*, 143). Ah Fatt, however, does not acknowledge Bahram's love for him, and is "often unresponsive, and sometimes even resentful" (*RS*, 143) of his father's gestures. Such is the extent of the son's animosity towards his father that Ah Fatt considers Bahram to be selfish in his complaints to Neel: "'For Father 'Freddy' like pet dog. That why he pat and hug and squeeze. Father care only for himself; no one else'" (*RS*, 144). A zamindar in the past and now an employee in Bahram's firm, Neel never even thought of considering his father's illegitimate children as his half-siblings. Hence, he recognizes and

reiterates to Ah Fatt that Bahram's conduct towards his illegitimate family is "not just unusual but quite exceptional for a man of his circumstances" (*RS*, 144). It pleased Neel to find that that gradually Ah Fatt feels "exhilarated" to be at the "centre of his father's attention" (*RS*, 144).

Bahram's successes as an opium merchant are balanced by his failures as the fruits of his labour prove to be elusive. He suffers a huge financial setback because the storm in the sea damages both his ship the *Anahita* and the massive cargo of opium. Arriving in Canton's Fanqui-town or Foreign Enclave, the helpless Bahram fails to dispose off his cargo because of the stand-off between the adamant Chinese authority and the British enforcers of Free Trade. His situation becomes nore complicated when an arrest warrant is issued against his name. The gifted entrepreneur with a luxurious lifestyle feels tormented with the idea that the Chinese security are scrutinizing him at every nook and corner of Canton: "Everywhere he looked, eyes seemed to be following him: although he strode along as fast as he could, the two-minute walk seemed to last an hour" (*RS*, 494). The most decisive blow is struck when the British, in a strategic move, decide to surrender their stock of opium to the Chinese. Bahram, who proclaimed to be ""the most loyal of the Queen's subjects"" (*RS*, 453) is shattered with a "sense of betrayal" (*RS*, 518) because the entire edifice of his sense of the world and his place in it proves to be an illusion. With his debts rising high and prospects for the future receding, Bahram takes shelter in his private world of dreams about his lost Chinese lover which culminates in his hallucinatory suicide in the Pearl River: "she seemed to be looking up from under the water's surface, smiling at him, beckoning with a finger" (*RS*, 546). Bahram is a helpless individual at the mercy of the broad sweeps of politics and history. His self-defence to Napoleon when asked about the ethics of opium-trade reveals how Bahram negotiates with his sense of self and evaluates his position in the wake of capitalist ideology: "Opium is like the wind or the tides: it is outside my power to affect its course. A man is neither good nor evil because he sails his ship upon the wind. It is his conduct towards those around him – his friends, his family, his servants – by which he must be judged. This is the creed I live by" (*RS*, 175). By focusing on the trials and tribulations of a character caught against the whirlwinds of forces beyond his control, the narrative portrays "a broad and many-sided picture of the everyday life of the people" (Lukács, 39). The narrative thus weaves a balance between

"analytical" and "affective" histories which emphasize plural ways of being in the world.

Sea of Poppies explored the destruction of indigenous agricultural practices when the native peasants were forced by the colonizers to cultivate opium. This ecological imperialism was aggravated by the transportation of a pauperized pool of landless labourers to Mauritius. This led to the development of the capitalist world economy with its open plunder of the periphery for the benefit of the centre. *River of Smoke* presents another aspect of this pillage of peripheral natural resources through the British naturalist Frederick 'Fitcher' Penrose's money-making ambitions to extract rare Third World flora and fauna and sell them in the West. His imperialistic greed considers China as a country "singularly blessed in its botanical riches, being endowed not only with some of the most beautiful and medicinally useful plants in existence, but also with many that were of immense commercial value" (*RS*, 101). Penrose's ship the *Redruth*, which had revolutionized the business of transporting plants across the seas, is a mobile world of greenery. Inspired by the twin impulses of thrift and profit, the sparse and angular *Redruth* is "an extension of Fitcher's very being" (*RS*, 75). Displaying a nurseryman's great diligence in not wasting even a single drop of water, the frugal Penrose's mode of living contrasts sharply with Bahram's affluence on the *Anahita*. Penrose's utilitarian attitude towards the natural world is the exact counterpoint of Paulette's sensitivity towards it. The young Frenchwoman, who joins Penrose after their fortuitous meeting in Mauritius, is dismayed at his cruelty towards marine creatures. When a breathing porpoise is hauled up from the *Redruth*'s fishing lines, instead of setting it free Penrose slaughters it and uses its fat. A practical bourgeois, he looked upon Nature as an "assortment of puzzles" which after a proper solution could provide "rich sources of profit" (*RS*, 78). Penrose thus embodies the reductionist principles of Enlightenment rationalism which attempted to master nature conceived as an enormous, soulless mechanism. Denouncing this fragmented, mechanical worldview, Plumwood equates it with the rise of capitalism "which needed to turn nature into a market commodity and resource without significant moral or social constraint" (111). Rejecting Penrose's claims of human mastery and possession of nature, the idealistic Paulette imbibed her father Pierre Lambert's naturalistic outlook that the love of Nature is a "kind of religion, a form of spiritual striving". An advocate of a holistic and organic

Man-Nature relationship, Lambert believed that "in trying to comprehend the inner vitality of each species, human beings could transcend the mundane world and its artificial divisions" (*RS*, 78). In terms of their antithetical attitude towards Nature, Penrose and the Lamberts work out a nicely framed dialectic.

What motivates Penrose's adventures in China is the quest for the Holy Grail of Chinese nature, the rare flower known as the Golden Camellia. His knowledge of this coveted species derives from the commercially popular Chinese illustrations of exotic flora which were shipped to Britain along with the botanical collections. While Penrose is obsessed with his single-minded business to possess the flower, Paulette is more curious to know about the provenance of the illustration of the Golden Camellia. Prevented from entering Canton because of Chinese laws forbidding the presence of foreign women, her only source of knowledge about Canton is her childhood friend Robin Chinnery. Reunited after a prolonged separation, Robin, the son of the painter George Chinnery, promises to find the rare flower for Paulette. Granted "a privileged point of vantage" (*RS*, 370) and thereby serving as the narrator's alter ego, Robin in his heavily descriptive letters to Paulette vividly represents Canton's multicultural world. The pre-colonial world that Robin creates in his letters challenges the contemporary notions about cosmopolitanism being a postmodern phenomenon. He discovers a nuanced world when thousands of Achhas (the Cantonese word for Hindusthanis), Arabs, Persians and Africans lived together in Canton. The guardian deity of the city is goddess Kuan-yin, a "bhikkuni" from Hindusthan. Buddhists from Hindusthan had lived in Canton for centuries, the most famous of them being a Kashmiri monk called Dharamyasa. The most famous of Buddhist missionaries, the Bodhidharma, came to Canton from south India. The syncretism of this rich medieval culture is embodied in the architecture of a mosque, one of the oldest in the world built in the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad himself. It is "a most remarkable structure, no different, in outward appearance, from a Chinese temple – all except for the minaret, which is like that of any dargah in Bengal" (*RS*, 377). By recovering traces of this primitive world, Robin journeys forward in space but backwards in time. The new rules of dominance and autonomy which the British brought with them to Canton during the Opium trade failed to alter the older structures of cultural solidarity. The narrator's observations on this issue corroborate Robin's views on medieval multiculturalism and trans-racial

togetherness: "The ties of trust and goodwill that bound the Hongists to the fanquis were all the stronger for having been forged across apparently unbridgeable gaps of language, loyalty and belonging" (*RS*, 346). Despite the vicious nature of the Opium trade, by erasing boundaries between people it enforced cultural diversity. Indians from "Sindh and Goa, Bombay and Malabar, Madras and the Coringa hills, Calcutta and Sylhet" (*RS*, 185) flocked together to create the "Achha" community of Canton. Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Parsis from India, whose paths never crossed in the subcontinent enjoyed an inexplicable "mysterious commonality" (*RS*, 193) which was thrust upon them. They stand united against "every variety of foreign devil" (*RS*, 185): the British are scoffed as the "I-says" and the French jeered as the "Merdes" (*RS*, 185). Neel is quite correct in his observation that "Fungtai Hong was a world in itself, with its own foods and words, rituals and routines: it was as if the inmates were the first inhabitants of a new country, a yet unmade Achhasthan" (*RS*, 192).

A corollary of this rich hybrid world is the exhilarating carnivalesque mix of languages, sonorous yet at times confusing. The English language in *Sea of Poppies* is interspersed with Indian terms from Bengali or Bhojpuri, as well as scattered French. When the narrative ventures out in sea along with the *Ibis*, it enters into the intricate world of Laskari language. The Laskari language was a rich cosmopolitan language, the language of command or sailing ships drawn from the English, Malay, Hindusthani, Chinese, Malayalam and the entire Babel of languages spoken on board. An eclectic web, the laskari language has a labyrinthine network which can be a puzzle to a newcomer as Zachary discovers:

> He had to get used to 'malum' instead of mate, 'serang' for bo'sun, 'tindal' for bosun's mate, and 'seacunny' for helmsman; he had to memorize a new shipboard vocabulary, which sounded a bit like English and yet not: the rigging became the 'ringeen', 'avast!' was 'bas!', and the cry of the middle-morning watch went from 'all's well' to 'alzbel'. The deck now became the 'tootuk' while the masts were 'dols'; a command became the a 'hookum' and instead of starboard and larboard, fore and aft, he had to sya 'jamna' and 'dawa', 'agil' and 'peechil'. (*SP*, 15-16)

The Laskari language, Ghosh observes is more like a "technical" and "specialized jargon" ("Networks and Traces", 34). The steady linguistic flow of this "unseen net of words" is the prime reason for the efficient functioning of the ship: "To work a sailship efficiently, dozens of men must respond simultaneously to a single

command" (Ghosh, "Of Fana's and Forecastles, 58). This lively melangue of tongues brings to mind Alu's "khichri of words" (*Circle of Reason*, 279) with which he communicates with the immigrant community in al-Ghazira. By foregrounding the remarkable vibrancy of the Laskari language the narrative celebrates the unsung lives of this mobile community and their lingua franca. The Lascars were the first Afro-Asians to participate freely in a globalized workspace, the first extensive travellers to settle in Europe, the first to adapt to a scheduled work culture and emergent new technologies. The Laskars were thus "in every sense the forerunners of today's migratory computer technicians, nurses, high-tech workers, and so on" (Ghosh, "Of Fana's and Forecastles, 58). The *Ibis* thus becomes a floating world with its own lexicon.

Amitav Ghosh's linguistic virtuosity takes a kaleidoscopic dimension in *River of Smoke*. The narrative opens in Mauritius and its first few pages are peppered with words from Mauritian creole and the Bhojpuri dialect of the Indian settler girmitiyas: "pus-pus", "palki", "bonoys", 'belsers", "bowjis", "salas", "sakubays", "bandobast", "gardmanzes", etc. By investing his narrative with native unfamiliar words and expressions, Ghosh imparts a sense of time and place to the multilingual universe of the Indian Ocean where one is "always surrounded by languages you don't understand" (Ghosh, "Untitled Books", 3). In a world where drug-peddlers become heroes, women disguise themselves as men, an ex-convict Indian landlord becomes a munshi, identities are endlessly reshaped, European, Indian and East Asian languages continuously interact with each other. The narrative shifts from thr indentured Indian labourers in Mauritius to the Indian mercantile community huddled in the "Achha Hong" complex in Canton. The phrase "Achha Hong" itself is a hybrid coinage. "Achha" is the Cantonese term for Indians; "Hong" is the Chinese word for trading house. The International Standard English of the third person narrative voice is sprinkled with words and phrases from the non-English linguistic world. The "Achhas", themselves a "motley gathering" from distinct parts of the Indian subcontinent, 'spoke between them more than a dozen different languages" (*RS*, 192). Bahram hears voices of the Chulia boatmen "talking, shouting and singing in Tamil, Telegu and Oriya" (*RS*, 63), Neel experiences employees hailing from disparate communities from the Bombay hinterlands conversing in "Gujarati, Marathi, Kachhi and Konkani" (*RS*, 313). Cantonese, Chinese, Portuguese, French, English, Mauritiun creole

languages seep into one another to create the hybrid pidgin language of the business community. Words like "chai" came from Cantonese, while the Portuguese word "falto" meaning fraudulent or false spoken by Bahram's efficient Portuguese manager Vico becomes *phaltu* on Achha tongues (*RS*, 192). A language with a peculiar syntax, pidgin has a peculiar sensibility of its own. While the grammar was that of the Cantonese, the words were mainly English, Portuguese and Hindusthani. The charming musical rhythm of Chi-mei's "sing-song" pidgin is noticeable when she expresses her sympathy for Bahram "'Mister Barry trouble have got? Blongi sad inside'" (*RS*, 70). The poetic and direct nature of this mode of communication is quite evident in Punhyqua's warnings to Bahram about the new governor Lin: "'Mr. Moddie, Lin Zexu, he savvy allo [...] Allo, allow. He have got too muchi spy. He sabbi how cargo come, who bringee, where it go. Allo he savvy. If he come Governor Canton too muchi bad day for trade" (*RS*, 291). Expressions such as these can only be understood by deducting the sense from the context. For the British, however, pidgin is an uncomfortable domain and they depend on "linkisters" i.e. three-way interpreters between Chinese hosts, pidgin and the English community. While discussing grave issues such as the Letters of the High Commissioner Lin the musical lilt of pidgin is supplanted by official English where translators play a key role. Exhilarated by this carnivalesque linguistic "chutneyfication", Neel plans a book on the multi-lingual commercial world of southern China whose proposed title is "*The Celestial Chrestomathy, Comprising A Complete Guide To and Glossary Of The Language Of Commerce in Southern China*" (*RS*, 272). Neel's *Chrestomathy*, a lexicon of English, Cantonese and pidgin, is inspired by his "providential" meeting with his "kindred spirit" (*RS*, 271) Liang-Kuei-Ch'uan, a printer and translator also known as Compton. As the compiler of this multilingual glossary Neel acts as the novelist's fictional double because *The Ibis Chrestomathy* has been published on Ghosh's website in 2008 when *Sea of Poppies* was published. The assertion that "words [...] no less than people, are endowed with lives and destinies of their own" (*The Ibis Chrestomathy*) is as much Neel's as his creator's. This linguistic hybridization is, no doubt, a corollary of multiculturalism. But to celebrate this multilingualism as a product of intermeshing of cultures is to overlook the strategies of resistance of South Asian colonized countries. By seizing the language of the centre i.e. English and re-positioning it in a discourse

suited to the colonized space, post-colonial literature writes back by the dual processes of "abrogation" and "appropriation" as Ashcroft explains:

> The first, the abrogation or denial of the privilege of 'English' involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication. The second, the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege. (*The Empire Writes Back*, 37)

By dislocating British English and introducing new cultural patterns into it, a postcolonial writer localizes it for creative use thereby producing a variety of "englishes". "To conquer English", declares Rushdie, "may be to complete the process of making ourselves free" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 17). By employing the strategies of code-switching and vernacular transcription, Ghosh abrogates the Standard English thereby strengthening his anticolonial stance.

The hybrid world of Achha Hong which Robin celebrates in his letters to Paulette is ravished by the brutal public executions of Punhyqua and Allow which predate the opium wars. These are followed by the bombardment of Canton by British and French gunships and the destruction of the thirteen foreign factories by the enraged mob which changed the place beyond recognition. Robin's premonition of the destruction of this incredible place inspired him to paint it on his canvas in July, 1839, seventeen years before the event took place. He also unearthed the secret that the plant called the Golden Camellia was nothing but a fictitious element, a moneyspinning "*HOAX*" (RS, 536) invented by a gentleman named William Kerr. What startles a sensitive artist like Robin is the riddle that a city "which has absorbed so much of the world's evil, has given, in return, so much beauty" (*RS*, 536) in the form of multitudes of flowers. An artist who sketches from life, which he finds "a great deal more rewarding" (*RS*, 352), comments on the nature of his art as an "epic scroll" which self-consciously draws attention to the nature of the narrative itself as a representation: "Events, people, faces, scenes would unroll as they happened: it will be something New and Revolutionary" (*RS*, 280). What is more, his "epic tableau" (*RS*, 215) is so wide that it as all-inclusive: "there are so many people here who simply *cannot* be left out" (*RS*, 215, italics original). The narrative's celebration of the micro-narratives of subaltern individuals and communities enables it to repudiate the imperial "forces of evil" which "celebrate their triumphal march through history" (*RS*,

553). Robin's paintings are the only surviving documents that testify to the existence of the rich multicultural world of 19th century Canton. Quite truly, the first two parts of the *Ibis Trilogy* are a diachronic version of history which re-interprets the imperial archives.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

After a detailed consideration of his novels, it is now time to undertake the ticklish business of indicating Ghosh's niche in recent Indian English fiction. Ghosh is not certainly obscure; he is as certainly not simple. He is lucid but elusive; he is serious but not portentous. He is accessible to the surface but puzzling in depth. He has won the love of the reading public; he has also won the esteem of the critics. Ghosh's specialty lies in his deft handling of political and philosophical issues without sacrificing the graces of art. Exhibiting a profound sense of history and space, his novels explore the human drama amidst the broad sweep of political and historical events. He has a personal stance on such controversial issues as postcoloniality, postmodernity, subjectivity, subalternity; he interweaves them in a complex pattern in his works which themselves are generic amalgams. Ghosh consistently critiques and displaces Eurocentric discourses of colonialism, migrancy and forms of knowledge production, and situates them within 'cosmopolitan' contexts and histories which are non-Western.

Central to Ghosh's oeuvre is the idea that the nation is a fiction whose boundaries are continuously reimagined and redrawn. Nationalism creates binary divisions, and projects a kind of "false" history which would buttress its own interest. The ideology of modernity and its various avatars like Western geographical and ideological expansionism, modernist knowledge production strategies, racism create a Manichaean dialectic between the self and its other. Ghosh's engagement with the frequency of boundary-crossings within and outside India, challenges the essentialist definitions of nations and societies. The cross-border flows in South Asian countries are an on-going process and not one-off movements as in the West. Through uncovering these on-going histories of migration and transnational flows that began several centuries ago, Ghosh interrogates the idea of the nation and borders. Each of his novels is concerned with migration and displacement which becomes a "mode of being in the world" (Carter, 101). The task that primarily concerns Ghosh then is "not how to arrive, but how to move, how to identify convergent and divergent movements; and the challenge would be how to locate such events, how to give them a social and

historical value" (Carter, 101). By way of questioning the ubiquitous presence of the West in the form of colonial authority, of power, of bureaucracy and of science, Ghosh traces genealogies, histories and routes of travel that question the role of the West as paradigmatically normative. He also revises the discourses of colonialism, of Indian nationalism and Indian colonial and national identity. Ghosh is concerned with the movements of the marginalized who have figured as an absence in bourgeois historiography. The ordinary folk, who are continuously on the move, range from an innocent orphan branded as a wanted "terrorist" by a postcolonial bureaucracy, third world labour en route to the imaginary world of al-Ghazira, unsung medieval traders who braved the stony pathways of medieval Asia, Egyptian immigrants in Arabia in search of the fruits of capitalism to the lascars who are considered the initiators of subaltern cosmopolitanism. European intervention destroyed these pre-colonial, rich cosmopolitan zones produced through trade and oceanic circulations. By recovering the traces of the buried narratives of these subaltern migrants, Ghosh disengages cosmopolitanism from colonialism and nationalism. He also establishes both the continuities and the discontinuities between pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial migrations. This mobile society of migrants is an assorted one because it brings together the Burmese royal family, a wealthy Raja, upper class women like Mayadebi in *The Shadow Lines* and Uma in *The Glass Palace*, and merges them with the ordinary, marginalized beings in a carnivalesque mix. With the erasure of the boundaries of language, of class and caste among them, these migrants replace the notion of authentic, discrete national cultures with a shared openness to the world espousing a utopian belief in a trans-racial, human collectivity. These intertwined histories of Indians and Egyptians, of Indians and Chinese, of Muslims and Jewish, of Hindus and Muslims, torn apart by political forces, are a bulwark against segregationist strategies that promote the cause of religious separatism, disregarding their shared common past.

Ghosh's endorsement of syncretism and humanism that downplay cultural differences explains his antipathy towards nationalism and its divisive epistemology. Despite his celebration of cultural pluralism, an acute sense of the sameness of man across "looking glass borders" and temporal divides underlies his work. Questioning the authoritarian and coercive actions of the postcolonial nation state, Ghosh pines for the Nehruvian utopia of a secularist, democratic

national unity which assimilates Indian diversity in a syncretic whole. Based on an ethically conceived solidarity, this feeling of communitarianism would provide an ideal alternative to religious and ethnic chauvinism and "Majoritarianism" as well as political dispersal and religious/ethnic violence rampant in contemporary Hindu nationalism. Dismantling the rigidity of national boundaries in the larger domain of the continent, Ghosh also calls for the protection of the Indian nation as a whole and its sub-cultures against the separatist forces in order to secure the peaceful co-existence of the heterogeneous Indian mass. Like Gandhi, he prizes pre-existing local identities and traditions as integral parts of a larger Indian whole. This explains the recurrent trope of weaving in his works. It becomes a metaphor not only for interconnections but also for a self-producing community incommensurable with the Western concept of the political nation-state with clear-cut territorial demarcations. As a corollary, Ghosh distrusts the nationalist political and official discourse of faceless and dehumanizing statist machinery which is detached from the actual lives of the people. Ghosh's antipathy towards traditional Western political nationalism and to the idea of the nation springs from his deep-seated ideological affiliations with Tagore and with the mid-nineteenth century Bengal Renaissance. Hence his efforts to carve out a specifically Indian modernity out of the encounter between the indigenous cultures and the Western model. Though recognized as a major postcolonial voice, he himself disavows that rubric. So ingrained is his anticolonialism that he devotes himself to examining the impact of the West on its erstwhile colonies and the universal process of globalization. He thematizes the migrations of people(s), the importance of connections between the past and the present, the changing status of the nation-states, the fluid nature of boundaries, intercultural communication beyond nationalism, the spread of Western modes of production and the encounters between different cultures, all of which are the fallout from globalization.

A recurrent motif in Ghosh's writings is an ethnographer/historian who enters into a democratic dialogue with the past with his profound imaginative empathy to recover the traces of marginal and suppressed stories. Quite often the textured histories that he excavates are external to the paradigm of either colonial conquest or anticolonial resistance and imagine a utopian world preceding the violence of Western imperialism. Intent on "provincializing" the hegemonic position of a Western-originated discourse as also the bourgeois historiography of

a decolonized state, the ethnographer-historian considers his subaltern subjects not as "other histories" or "other knowledges". He rather imagines their discursive-epistemic spaces as forms of openness for a genuine transcultural open-ended dialogue. In meeting the other, he remains open and responsive to them, rather than defining them from his own starting point. Alterity, i.e. the unknowable and unreachable nature of the other, cannot be attained, but can be imagined, and hence activated. The ethnographic, historical subjects are transformed from passive objects of traditional ethnographic representation and knowledge into active agents/characters with a historical trajectory of their own. This mode of knowledge formation is a two-directional act of knowing, a moment of contact between two active participants who meet as pure consciousnesses. To "recover" the history of the subalterns, the historian "translates" discrepant "life-worlds" and experiences through secular explanatory modes. The ethnographer constructs the subjectivity of his historical subject in a two-dimensional narrative process. He imaginatively interprets and interweaves the textual traces from the scraps of manuscripts he has found in archives through his narrative process as well as relates his search for these documents. The exhaustive Notes section at the end of the novels testifies to the empirical and philological research he has also conducted on the documents. The subaltern subject that is put together from textual traces gains in agency in the very process of being narrated into existence. In order to overcome the limitations of historical archives, Ghosh's writings build up a complex series of intersections between material documents like personal diaries, fragments of letters, schedules as well as individual memories to re-construct the past. By taking into account not only the hard facts but also the emotions, thoughts and actions of these seemingly ordinary individuals, Ghosh weaves an inclusive historical narrative, an imaginative micro history which lies embedded in the macro history of the imperial project. History as a palimpsest seems to be one of Ghosh's favourite metaphors. Evidently what Ghosh tries to reconcile are the "analytical" histories based on rational categories and the "affective" histories based on the plural ways of being-in-the-world. By bringing together the fictive reconstructions of the past based on memory and excavating the erased histories from hegemonic official representations, Ghosh's novels highlight imagination as a way of transcending and challenging their neutrality. By stretching the limits of history, they open up new possibilities for the

emergence of different "life-worlds". A proliferation of stories serves to narrate this "truth". The stories lack veracity as the products of imagination. But each tale individualizes the teller by situating him in a particular social and economic background. Moreover, by celebrating the egalitarian spirit of oral tradition and storytelling, the narrative dismantles the notion of a single, determinate authoritative meaning. The possibility of plural interpretations rules out authoritative value-judgments and closures of meaning. To avoid appropriation, Ghosh tries to give these people agency and their own point of view by allowing them to narrate their own stories. The sections narrating the everyday lives of immigrants derive their verve from dialogic stories of the past as well as of the present, stories inspired by historical 'facts' but also by myth, rumour, magic and fantasy. Ghosh does not use anything like the Rushdian chutnified or Sanskritized English to represent the language of the lower class narrators. Everything is translated into English grapholect, with an indication in the text of the kind of variety in question. It is in the *Ibis trilogy* that Ghosh achieves this linguistic virtuosity with his representation of the lascari language and Chinese pidgin.

Ghosh's writings thus explore alternative ways of constructing the world based on connections that dismantle the rigid binaries and empiricism of Western modernity. These fictive constructions interrogate both the grounds and the production of historical knowledge. They read between the lines of the imperial archives and emerge as alternative discourses for expressing the subaltern past. Ghosh seems to endorse the postmodernist conception of the discursive nature of reality and of its relativity. But at the same time, he also explores the abyss, the "silence" that language is unable to bridge. Meaning can only be formed when there is perfect correspondence between the world and the word, between the world of experience and the method of representation. The recurring metaphor of silence stands for those untranslatable experiences as well as for subalternity, the past that historiography fails to explain. Silence also represents a mode of epistemology, an inscrutable experience that cannot be represented or mediated by either language or scientific empiricism. What is questioned is the transparency of language as a means of communication and the equation of language with meaning. This anti-intellectualist stance nudges Ghosh towards the recesses of mysticism.

Beginning his career in the wake of *Midnight's Children* (1981), Ghosh was obviously influenced by the multidimensional, cosmopolitan and richly allusive style of Rushdie. Ghosh, however, does not embrace postmodernism as whole-heartedly as his illustrious predecessor, but uses postmodern literary techniques to examine the birth, development and crisis of the Indian nation and the postcolonial Indian identity. His debut novel *The Circle of Reason*, like many Indian novels written in the 1980s, owes a great stylistic debt to Rushdie's magic realist mode in his *magnum opus*. Ghosh's decision to abandon this literary 'chutnification' in his subsequent novels, especially after the impact of the riots in 1984 following Indira Gandhi's assassination, signals the moment at which he begins to articulate his ideas more effectively. Rejecting the familiar linearity of the conventional Western "realist" novel, he evolves a narrative strategy which disrupts the linearity and locational specificity of time and space, and juxtaposes widely separated historical epochs. True to the phenomenological mode, the narratives from *The Shadow Lines* (1988) onwards explore multiple interpretations of a single event and subvert the official archived versions. By focusing on the slippage or gap in historiography and dismantling the established distinctions between past and present, fact and fiction, by the occasional self-reflexive stance of his writings, Ghosh's narratives approximate to "Historiographic Metafictions". The genesis of many of Ghosh's novels can be traced back to his discursive writings. *In An Antique Land* owes its origins to his Ph.D. thesis, the research article "The Slave of MS. H.6" and the prose piece "The Imam and the Indian". Similarly, *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma*, "54 University Avenue, Yangon" and "India's Untold War of Independence" contain the seeds of *The Glass Palace*. Furthermore, *The Calcutta Chromosome* is replete with intertextual references to Ronald Ross's *Memoirs*, Charles Dickens's story "The Signalman", Tagore's short story "Khuditopashan" translated as "The Hungry Stone" and the short stories of the Hindi writer Paneshwarnath Renu. Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* serves as an intertextual background for the animals' intimate association with nature and man's alienation from it. While postmodernist fiction restricts itself to the security of narrative formats like parody, pastiche and play, Ghosh's elastic conception of the novel as the "overarching form" enables him to shape it as he wills. Consequently he soars above fixed categories, generic as well as hermeneutic.

The exposition of Ghosh's evolving philosophy in this study must not create the misleading impression that he is primarily interested in directly propagating his ideas. His keen interest in the predicament of individuals pitted against historical forces enables him to explore the depths of fundamental human experiences and emotions. This emphasis on individuality, one of the cornerstones of humanism, differentiates Ghosh from his postmodern contemporaries like Salman Rushdie who prefers caricatures or two-dimensional "cartoon" characters. In delineating his characters, Ghosh jettisons the conventional postcolonial discourse which ironically promotes racial and ethnic differences. He instead has his characters embody allotropic humanity, and undergo elemental human emotions. Though the stories his characters tell locate each teller in the material domain and promote particularism, their ethnic and racial, religious and communal differences are of no consequence whatsoever. For these characters are not cocooned within their separate and local identities; their emotions and passions are symbiotic and co-extensive as they move towards a narrativistic transcendent unity.

As a novelist delighting in creating vibrant characters rather than in propagating ideas, Ghosh exposes his characters to unusual terrains like the Sahara desert or the Sundarbans, and lets them enjoy the bliss of love or suffer unusual deaths. Quite often, as if in a dialectical interplay, love and death walk hand in hand, and occasion ineffable experience. Sombhu Debnath's passion for Parboti Debi causes the wiping out of Balarm's family in the first section of *The Circle of Reason*. Inspector Jyoti Das's carnal desire so intensifies Kulfi's own passion that she dies of cardiac arrest. Equally inexplicable is Mast Ram's sexual passion and his self-immolation as is Nury's unusual death. Gruesome is the death of an elderly war-victim whose tongue has been cut out, and who falls in the sea and is eaten up by sharks. Tridib's craving for a dreamt of assignation with his beloved May and for a transcendent experience remains unfulfilled as he is slaughtered by a frenzied mob. Grigson and Farley in *The Calcutta Chromosome* are mysteriously killed by a train in colonial India; they are the victims of an elusive subaltern network. *The Glass Palace* is a novel of love and death. Demonic cruelty paradoxically coexists with feminine tenderness in Supayalat. So diabolic is the wickedness that stems from her love of and ambition for her husband that to secure the throne for Thebaw she orders the killing of all potential

rivals in the Royal Family. The gory history of the Burmese Royal Family is surpassed by the brutality of the riots between the Burmese and the Indians. The novel is replete with the deaths of frustrated individuals in despair who cannot withstand the forces of history. An ineffectual pawn in the hands of the British, the Collector Beni Prasad Dey becomes something of a tragic hero as he walks into the waters to drown himself. Rajkumar's son Neel is crushed to death in Rangoon when the Japanese bombs scatter the frightened elephants in his plantation. Frustration compels his wife Manju to drown herself during the Long March to India. Saya John and Alison unfortunately chance upon a group of Japanese soldiers. While the old man is shot immediately, Alison shoots herself after a spirited exchange of fire. Waging a desperate battle for national liberation and also for self-realization, Arjun dies a heroic death in central Burma in the final days of the Second World War. The novel also explores the multifaceted nature of love ranging from Rajkumar's love at first sight for Dolly, Arjun's instinctive desire for Alison, the self-sustaining love of Dinu and Alison in the midst of wartime despair the rather bizarre union of the aged pair — Rajkumar and Uma in bed at the novel's end. *The Hungry Tide* examines the whole gamut of human experiences in the wilderness of the Sundarbans. It presents the spirited resistance of the settlers in Morichjhapi against the terror tactics of the state machinery and their miserable deaths. The subalterns' death however can be seen as that of a martyr. The subaltern's role is both that of a symbol of resistance to the dominant power and of the utopian promise of an alternative life world. This finds its final affirmation and guarantee in death. The novel is a veritable cornucopia of unrequited love across two generations – Nirmal's unreciprocated love for Kusum, Kanai's for Kusum, Kusum's for Horen, Piya's for Fokir. Kusum and Fokir, the 'authentic' subalterns who resist modernity, die. Their stories are recounted and scripted by literate, modern characters like Nirmal, Kanai and Piya. *Sea of Poppies* presents the rise of a native rebel against the combined powers of imperialism and native feudalism – Kalua's rebellion against Subedar Bhyro Singh and Ah Fatt's assertion of his individuality at the end by eliminating the British First Mate Crowle. *River of Smoke* relates the rags-to-riches story of the Parsi Bahram Modi; it chronicles his professional struggles, his personal dilemmas and his unfortunate suicide. The trilogy also celebrates love that transcends racial and cultural differences – the French woman Paulette's love for

the mulatto Zachary Reid, the Parsi Bahram's emotional attachments to the Chinese Chi-mei. This intricate relationship between love and death that recurs throughout Ghosh's oeuvre denotes his humanist vision. Ideas and ideals, theories and philosophies, fettered as they are by time and place, are pretty ephemeral compared with the staying power of man's fundamental experiences and elemental emotions. The great novelists, asserts Maugham, "deal with the subjects of enduring concern to mankind: God, love and hate, death, money, ambition, envy, pride, good and evil; in short, with the passions and instincts common to all from the beginning of time" (304). The chances of Ghosh's going down to posterity lie not so much in the theoretical as in the emotive components of his works.

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