

Collapsing Boundaries: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Amitav Ghosh



Abhigyan Prasad

**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
Guwahati 781039
India
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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy



Abhigyan Prasad
Roll No. 02614101

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
Guwahati 781039
India
February 2009

Dedicated to the loving
memory of my late
Grandmother





Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Department of Humanities & Social Sciences

Guwahati - 781 039
(Assam), INDIA

STATEMENT

I hereby declare that the matter embodied in this thesis, entitled **Collapsing Boundaries: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Amitav Ghosh**, is the result of research carried out by me in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, India under the supervision of Dr. Rohini Mokashi-Punekar, Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences.

IIT Guwahati

February 2009

(Abhigyan Prasad)



Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Department of Humanities & Social Sciences

Guwahati - 781 039

(Assam), INDIA

Phone: +91-361-2582555

Fax: +91-361-2582599

Dr. Rohini Mokashi-Punekar

Associate Professor

Email: rohini@iitg.ernet.in

rohinimokashipunekar@yahoo.co.uk

CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the matter embodied in the thesis entitled **Collapsing Boundaries: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Amitav Ghosh**, submitted for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Abhigyan Prasad, a student of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, India, has been carried out under my supervision. It is also certified that this work has not been submitted anywhere else for the award of a research degree.

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(Dr. Rohini Mokashi-Punekar)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I

Amongst the major Indian novelists writing in English today, Amitav Ghosh has earned a reputation for consistently experimenting with different forms of fiction. If the work of Rushdie defines the postcolonial and postmodern novel and Seth's freewheeling career spans a diverse range of literary genres and themes, Ghosh uses new forms of the novel to suit the thematic diversity of his preoccupations. Even while Ghosh's partiality is for fiction, he effortlessly traverses multiple roles of a novelist, an anthropologist, a journalist, a travel writer and an academic, and his novels reflect a wide range of concerns as they resist rigid frameworks of form and theme. Within the canvas of Indian Writing in English (IWE), Ghosh enjoys a significant position that is the result of his profound engagement with and searching exploration of issues troubling the contemporary world which find expression in his generically elusive novels. Ghosh has published, to wide critical acclaim, six novels, a multi-generic text, a travelogue, two volumes of collected essays, a pamphlet/commentary on the nuclear situation in India and Pakistan, and has contributed many essays and articles to leading journals and newspapers. In a period spanning more than two decades, Ghosh has steadily built up a substantial body of work that demands sustained study and interpretation. Ghosh's novels make important interventions particularly in the area of postcolonial studies which justifies a focused analysis. They attempt to give a new dimension in the creative space to those issues and concerns that have been at the vanguard of contemporary intellectual discussions and debates.

Ghosh's first novel was published when the Indian English literary scene was infused with the excitement of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). Not unexpectedly *The Circle of Reason* (1986) was loosely garbed in the magic realist strain, so powerfully evoked by Marquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1970),

and closer at hand by Rushdie. Brilliant in parts, *The Circle of Reason* initially attracted critical attention as a postmodern text largely because of an arresting metaphor: that of the protagonist trapped in the rubble of a massive building who is miraculously saved by a concrete slab balanced precariously on two ancient-looking sewing machines. Anthony Burgess, who praised the novel for its technicality, intelligence and brilliant handling of language, read it as a satire on Western imperialism predicated on the opposition between tradition and progress. By resisting any easy categorization—the narrative uses alternately picaresque, bildungsroman and detective frames—Ghosh's debut novel drew attention, very early on, to his would-be trademark tendency of spilling over generic boundaries. Moreover, the two settings of the Persian Gulf and North Africa introduced a novelty within IWE as it opened up new geographical spaces for further literary exploration. In 1990, the French translation of *The Circle of Reason* was awarded the *Prix Medicis Étrangère* in Paris, a top literary award of France.

Two years later, Ghosh published his most popular, enduring and possibly his best novel, *The Shadow Lines* (1988). A family saga involving a Bengali 'bhadralok' family and an English family spread across three generations, this novel sealed the status of Ghosh as a major Indian novelist writing in English. Presented in the form of family portraits, the narrative abandons the magic realist strain of the debut novel and embraces an ostensible realism as it carries along the lilting tenor of Bengali prose. This novel also introduced a novelty in IWE by way of the narrator who remains unnamed throughout the narrative.¹ The novel is remarkable for its deft and tender handling of the narrator's relationship with Tridib, the peripatetic uncle who makes him feel and imagine spaces by pointing them out on an old Bartholomew's Atlas. In a very poignant scene later in the narrative, the narrator—an adult now—draws two equal circles on Tridib's old Bartholomew's Atlas as he tries to come to terms with the dynamics that govern the relationships between peoples and communities in the Indian subcontinent. The novel can be also interpreted as Ghosh's attempt to exorcise the ghosts of two riots which he witnessed at two different locations and times. The first of these riots, recollected vividly in *In An Antique Land* (204-10), was witnessed by Ghosh as a child living with his parents in Dhaka in 1964. This memory comes back to claim, in *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator's uncle Tridib in a typical sub-

continental riot in Dhaka. The second is the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 in Delhi which he was witness to as an adult and which was later recollected in the essay “The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi” (*Imam* 46-62). *The Shadow Lines* is one of the most vigorous critiques of nationalism, of reified national and cultural boundaries that pit one set of people against another. As the title suggests, this novel espouses a human subjectivity that can essentially cross these man-made boundaries, thereby rendering the all too material lines of the map into shadow lines. Prescribed since the early nineties as a text in university curricula, *The Shadow Lines* has, more than any other novel, endeared Ghosh’s work to the academic fraternity in India and abroad. Of all Ghosh’s novels, it happens to be the one that has been academically and critically engaged with the most. In 1989 it won the Sahitya Akademi Award.

His next work *In An Antique Land* (1992) is an unexpectedly hybrid text from a writer whose reputation as a leading novelist was firmly entrenched. Based on experiences in an Egyptian village while gathering ethnographic data for his doctoral dissertation, it subversively attempts to recuperate the history of an Indian slave, Bomma. The book is the story of a medieval Indian slave who had a Jewish master, and who traveled across the Indian Ocean from the western coast of India to the Persian Gulf. There are two parallel narratives based on this theme: in one Ghosh is the historian trying to retrieve the Indian slave who survives as a trace in records of Western historiography; and in the other Ghosh figures as the ethnographer and the anthropologist gathering data in the ‘field’. The book opened to very enthusiastic reviews—especially in Western academia—that largely considered it as an experimental and a postmodern text (see the next section). The text famously brings to crisis the two disciplines of anthropology and historiography. While it offers an alternative and a far more dialogic and non-hegemonic way of doing ethnography, it also raises the profoundly philosophical question of whether it is ultimately possible to track the real subaltern and his history.

While these three works amply demonstrated Ghosh’s creative engagement with political issues within the context of families, village communities and expatriate settlements, collectivities that vibrate with a sense of close-bonding and kinship, not necessarily spilling over into the nation, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) came as a

surprise because it is about detached individuals at different sites, disconnected and cut off from one another. (In a weird way, these detached individuals are also after a collective, a community that would ultimately transcend space and time.) The novel takes off from gaps and silences in the hegemonic autobiographical account of the canonical Western scientist Ronald Ross, the discoverer of the malaria parasite. Ross's text, *Memoirs*, is largely responsible for posthumously steering the reputation of the scientist as a 'lone genius' at the expense of his native laboratory assistants. Offered as a deconstructionist re-reading of Ronald Ross's *Memoirs*, Ghosh's novel engages in a fictive reconstruction of the history of malaria research that attempts to recuperate the crucial contributions of the native subaltern assistants whose work Ross appropriates in his *Memoirs*. To this end, the novel uses the form of the science fiction genre. The novel, like the preceding work *In An Antique Land*, profoundly problematises the question of genre as it simultaneously straddles the boundaries of science fiction, detective thriller, ghost story and subaltern history. Though it won the prestigious Arthur C. Clarke Award for the best work of science fiction in 1996, the debates about the novel's generic categorizations have not been laid to rest. However, the science fiction narrative added a novelty to IWE thereby broadening its parameters.

Ghosh continued his engagement with history and imperialism in *The Glass Palace* (2000), any discussion of which is inevitably bound up with the letter which he addressed the organizers of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, withdrawing his novel from the competition. The letter created quite a flutter in literary and academic circles and Ghosh "felt compelled to write to several past winners of the award who were his friends, and explain that he was not impugning them for accepting the award, but was simply making a philosophical point that needed to be discussed by South Asians, British literary critics, and other so-called 'Commonwealth' writers" (Hawley, Amitav 168). The next year the novel won the Grand Prize for Fiction at the Frankfurt International e-Book Awards. A historical novel couched in the epic narrative mode, *The Glass Palace* traces the transformation of Burma from the period of British colonization to the contemporary rule of the military Junta and the resistance movement of Aung San Suu-Kyi. It captures the loss of power of the Burmese King Thebaw and Queen Supalayath, their exile to a town on the western coast of India, the

Second World War fought in South-east Asia, the creation of the Indian National Army, and the “Long March” when millions of Indians crossed over from Burma into India via difficult and treacherous terrains. Despite the initial controversy, the novel has continued to elicit a favourable critical response in India as well as abroad and critics have praised its epical sweep, grand canvas, and its use of classic nineteenth-century Victorian realism. It is perhaps the first time in his literary career that Ghosh uses realism as a narrative technique. While *The Shadow Lines* apparently employs realism, Ghosh’s constant attempt is to modify and subvert it in order to question the easy connection between an event and its representation. *The Glass Palace* recuperates many histories, the most important among them being the connection by trade, labour and other forms of contact between the Indian mainland and Burma, through the north-eastern part of the nation, which has almost been written off from the nationalist imaginations on both the sides.

Ghosh’s penchant for focusing on hitherto unrepresented regions and histories takes him to the Sundarbans in *The Hungry Tide* (2004)—a geographical region near Calcutta known for its wildlife and mangrove forests, and which is arguably on the margins of the Indian nation. While Ghosh’s novels do show a preoccupation with space and critically engage with the perception of space, in *The Hungry Tide* he displays a near total commitment to the representation of a particular topography. The Sundarbans, in this novel, is much more than a typical setting: it is the main structural trope of the novel around which the multiple narratives are woven. *The Hungry Tide* partially carries forward the legacy of *In An Antique Land* because it is also an ethnographic narrative that zooms in closely on the food, customs, religion, and lifestyle of the inhabitants of the Sundarbans. It also echoes the earlier text in its representation and espousal of syncretic forms of religious practices. This novel continues too, in a sense, the legacy of *The Glass Palace* in the use of the realist technique, though the ethnographic content and the purpose of the novelist ensure that realism in this later text is quite different from the realism in the previous. *The Hungry Tide* did not open to particularly enthusiastic reviews, and it has not been able to elicit too many critical analyses either though it won in the same year the Hutch Crossword book award for the best work in English Fiction.² This is intriguing to say the least because the novel makes a creative and timely intervention into the debates

surrounding conservation issues, and the bearing these debates have on marginalized communities that depend on natural resources for their livelihood and survival. By contextualizing the predicaments of a twice-displaced community in conflict with the state for asserting its right over natural resources and the environment, and a fringe and marginalized population in the Sundarbans eking out a precarious existence on the peripheries of the Indian mainland, Ghosh's novel complicates the whole category of 'development' that is otherwise taken as a given. At a philosophical level, it also engages with the complexities that underwrite the human-animal and human-nature relationships.

Ghosh is a prolific writer: since the publication of his first novel in 1986 he has published several books and is now the author of a substantial body of writing that has enriched the tapestry of IWE in various ways. By some quirk or accident he has published a major work every four years, coinciding in fact with the leap year. Published four years after *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh's most recent novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008), the first part of a planned trilogy, is set in early nineteenth-century India during the rule of East India Company, when opium trade was enriching the coffers of the company as well as of the British Empire. At the centre of the novel is a former slave-ship, the *Ibis*, which is used to transport indentured labour to Mauritius and opium to China. The action sets off simultaneously at two locations involving two sets of characters. In a village near the opium factory of Ghazipur, the action unfolds around Deeti, her daughter Kabutri, and Kalua. In Calcutta, the action unfolds around a set of mixed characters that include British merchants, a zamindar, native clerks, the captains and mates of a ship. In a somewhat surprising manner, the narrative begins in a magic realist fashion as Deeti has a "vision of a tall-masted ship, at sail on the ocean" that she had never materially seen before, "not even in a dream" (3). However the dominant narrative technique seems to be realism inflected with a high degree of naturalism. Marked by the use of lascari language, Hobson-Jobson kind of English and numerous nautical terms, the novel makes a deliberate attempt at representing faithfully the pidgin language that Ghosh claims was the lingua franca of seamen across the Indian Ocean. As a historical novel, *Sea of Poppies* attempts to create a whole ambience of sights and sounds strongly reminiscent of the period in question. It draws attention to the historical importance of opium trade in the success of the

British Empire, the movement of global capital and labour across the globe, and the historical processes through which expatriate Indian communities were made and unmade at plantation sites like the Carribean, Mauritius and Fiji.

II

Amitav Ghosh's works have attracted critical attention in the form of essays in journals, chapters in books, edited volumes and full-length studies in books and PhD dissertations. However, considering the stature of the novelist and the significance of his works, it must be admitted that full-length studies in the form of books have been fewer. Apart from edited volumes, there have been only two books published on Ghosh till date, both monographs and both part of a series each. Moreover, critical studies of texts later than *The Calcutta Chromosome* are fewer, with mainly reviews available of *The Hungry Tide* and the recent *Sea of Poppies*. The following review of literature will consider the major interventions made by critics and commentators which are useful from the point of view of the present study.

Anthony Burgess's review of *The Circle of Reason* that appeared in the *New York Times Book Review* in 1986 was perhaps one of the earliest literary responses that ensured a wide and international reading public for the works of Ghosh. Calling the novel "a remarkable achievement", Burgess very significantly draws attention to its "brilliant handling of language" and its status as a postmodern text (6). *The Circle of Reason* has elicited critical studies addressing questions of form, structure and the genre. G. J. V. Prasad suggests that the novel has a circular structure where certain tropes such as the book *Life of Pasteur*, birds and carbolic acid recur at regular intervals. Apart from the circularity, he also detects an "intricate buti work," a complex pattern of networks woven largely around the trope of story-telling ("Re-Writing" 59-61). It was almost inevitable that the novel would be discussed as magic realist, published as it was in the wake of that quintessentially magic realist text *Midnight's Children*. Apart from the essays of Shyam S. Agarwalla and K. Damodar Rao, Stephanie Jones offers interesting new insights on the use of this technique. She looks at the text's etymological tracings of words, of the global history of the loom, the polylinguistic history of cotton, and doubles them up with polylingualism in the text to discover that the use of magic realism in Ghosh does not threaten to

overwhelm, like Rushdie, “the telling of specific, peripheral histories” (431). Claire Chambers adds a new dimension to this debate as she argues, contrary to generally held opinion, “that there are elements of social realism in Ghosh’s portrayal of the Middle East” (“Representations” 39). Chambers establishes interesting links between the passages detailing the lives of the expatriate workers in Gulf, the thriving oil economy of the region and Ghosh’s essay “Petrofiction” that rues the lack of literature engendered by the great oil encounter. Through the use of multifarious literary forms like picaresque, social realism and magic realism, Ghosh’s novel, in Chambers’ opinion, “adumbrates techniques for representing the ‘slipperiness’ of the oil encounter in fiction” (47). Leading us away from the discussion of form and genre, another of Chambers’ essays looks at the categories of ‘science’, ‘reason’ and ‘pseudo-science’ and their historical appropriation in colonial India under a hierarchical power structure that largely favoured the metropolis. In her opinion, Ghosh’s text exposes the subtexts—colonial, cultural, historical—of Western scientific discourses; shows that the rigid boundaries between science and pseudo-science are indeed porous; and points to a historical appropriation of Western science and rationality that involved much more reciprocal exchanges than is admitted to in colonialist discourses (“Historicizing”).

Meenakshi Mukherjee’s essay on *The Shadow Lines* is a seminal piece on the novel, possibly the most seminal essay in the whole body of criticism on Ghosh. She argues that the mirror image is central to the novel because its use dissolves distances, physical space and even time in such ways that time and space become “dimensions of an individual’s desire in which the actual and the imagined co-exist harmoniously” (“Maps” 258). The perception of real and imagined space is crucial, in her opinion, to the articulation of one’s sensibility and imagination. Ila’s inability to perceive time and space imaginatively is the crucial difference between her and the narrator. About the use of realism in the novel, Mukherjee thinks that despite the documentary accuracy that aims at verisimilitude, the novel’s narrative technique actually destabilizes “the simple equation between events and their written report,” thereby, invalidating “realism as a narrative mode in *The Shadow Lines*” (259). Other critics like Vinita Chandra (68) and Jon Mee (“Burthen” 91-92) also concur that the ostensible use of realism as a narrative mode does not conform to the norms of

traditional social realism. Mee discusses the novel as being structured around three basic time frames, which leak into one another, just as the narrative moves seamlessly across three geographical locations of Calcutta, Dhaka and London. Mee reads into this seamless movement a desire for translation—bordering on transcendence—espoused mainly by the male characters in their attempts at constructing a cosmopolitanism that will tide over national and cultural differences. However, Mee refuses to see such cosmopolitanism as transcendent because for him “Tridib’s is a contextualizing imagination” rooted firmly in the materiality of his anthropological background (102). Shameem Black focuses on the construction of cosmopolitanism vis-à-vis home, and identifies Tridib as “an ideal cosmopolitan precisely because of his immersion within discourses of home” (57). Against Tridib’s cosmopolitanism, Black sets off Ila’s antiseptic rootlessness and May’s ultimately transformed cosmopolitan outlook that is freed of “the remnants of imperial privilege” after she discovers the true import of Tridib’s death (60). Basically, Black’s espousal of a non-imperial cosmopolitanism that is not articulated at the expense of the ‘home’, domesticity and rootedness is offered as a critique of masculinist and imperialist constructions of cosmopolitanism.

An area of the novel that has commanded some amount of critical attention is its construction of gendered identity and the gendered construction of nationalism. Suvir Kaul, for whom the insistent and shaping force of memory generates the form of the novel, contends that the women characters—most notably Ila—are made to bear “the burden of other people’s expectations,” cultural differences and encounters (274). For these women, unlike their male counterparts in the text, “there are no transformations of cultural frontiers, only inelegant transgressions” (285). For Kaul, the novel though dialogic is also a “male *bildungsroman*” that is not free of asymmetrical representation of characters based on gender (286). Rajeswari Sunder Rajan takes this argument of asymmetrical representation a step further by arguing that as subjects of history, the English characters are represented as playing active roles whereas, the characters from the subcontinent are represented as trapped within history. Interestingly, Rajan argues that the consciousness of the narrator and the central vision of the text have been conflated to such an extent that the reader is pressurized into accepting “the narrator’s account and his interpretations of men,

women and events as the definitive versions of reality” (296-97).³ Furthermore to this conflation, Rajan detects “a covert misogyny” in the representation of Ila and the grandmother that also carries a “harsh air of retribution about them” (298). The text’s construction of division of experience based on the markers of gender and race, feels Rajan, is problematic because of the asymmetry of representation. For Chandra also, women characters in the novel are condemned to “bear the burden of articulating certain positions, such as those of militant nationalism, cosmopolitanism,” “a post-colonial female perspective” etc. (75). Her contention is that the representation of women characters conforms to and even reifies their place in dominant discourses because of Ghosh’s failure to vest them with independent subject positions. Hence, even a favourably portrayed character like May reacts with “uncontrolled, emotional response of hysteria” to the fact of Tridib’s death whereas the narrator and Robi are able to collate the private and the public aspects of it (77). A similar understanding also informs Neelam Srivastava’s interpretation of the gendered construction of nationalism in *The Shadow Lines* that finds that Ila and the grandmother are the two characters who most feel the “need to adhere to a received narrative” (“Fictions” 83). A. N. Kaul sounds a somewhat cautionary note as he finds that Ghosh’s novel tends to disregard most of the material realities as illusions thereby “attributing value and a higher reality to a sort of amorphous romantic subjectivity” (299). As realities do not melt away or vaporize because one calls them illusions, he finds the novel romantically escapist and reads it as “a metaphor for evading rather than exploring political realities” (303). Though Kaul’s analysis has been critiqued (see for instance Mee “Burthen”), it nevertheless remains an important example of classical Marxist interpretation that stresses on the material aspects of reality.

James Clifford’s highly favourable and influential review of *In An Antique Land* in *London Review of Books* brought additional international recognition for Ghosh’s works and at the same time engendered anthropological interpretations. Though *In An Antique Land* will not be considered in the present study because it is not fiction, nevertheless some of the select criticism that has a bearing on the present study will be touched upon. Contrary to Clifford’s commendation of the non-hegemonic nature of Ghosh’s text, Javed Majeed finds that the authoritative persona of Ghosh, the ethnographer, is continuously reaffirmed throughout his anthropological

account of the Egyptian village. Majeed even goes on to proclaim that Ghosh's strategy "is politically ineffectual as far as counteracting religious militancy" is concerned (52). For Gauri Viswanathan, "Ghosh's turn to a culturally and religiously hybrid medieval past," and his "engagement with the romance of syncretism, as a solution to sectarianism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, and religious intolerance, evokes a nostalgia that is itself unsettling" (Viswanathan www.stanford.edu). Reading homogeneity into Ghosh's attempt that is bent on denying the historical reality of religious and cultural differences, she interprets Ghosh's enterprise as not offering any "ways of dealing with what is, after all, an intractable political problem" (www.stanford.edu). (Majeed's and Viswanathan's stance on political ineffectuality chimes well with the argument advanced by A. N. Kaul.) Against the overtly political arguments of Majeed and Viswanathan, Neelam Srivastava offers a way out by proposing to look at Ghosh's ethnography in terms of narrative and fiction. For this purpose, she sets *In An Antique Land* against Ghosh's D. Phil thesis and makes a case for *In An Antique Land* as a literary text, an ethnographic fiction, to be precise ("Amitav"). *In An Antique Land* has also been looked at as differential history that subversively reconfigures the terms of the dominant modes of Western historiography so as to recuperate lost subalterns like Bomma and neglected cultural contacts like the medieval Indian Ocean trade (see Leela Gandhi "A Choice of Histories"; Padmini Mongia "Medieval Travel in Postcolonial Times"; and Anshuman Mondal "Allegories of Identity").

In his book *Babu Fictions* (2001), Tabish Khair explores the matrix of Babu-Coolie relationship within Indian novels in English. The book sensitively focuses on the insurmountable problem of expressing the agency of the coolie in a language that is the sole preserve of the babus. In his excellent chapter on *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Khair considers the novel as an attempt to do precisely that while still keeping intact the category of the 'coolie', subaltern in other words. He weighs the novel against charges of an apparent postmodern playfulness of the narrative identified mainly by Western critics and opines that the construction of the subaltern in terms of "Ir/rationality" and "in/Comprehensibility" posits the novel as an instance of a serious engagement with far more serious issues. The presence of an intricate plot-set against the "immense, rambling and seemingly shapeless" "flowing

narrative” that characterize Indian novels in English—and the use of a language that undermines the essentialist dichotomies between the West and India, argues Khair, mark the restoration of agency and history to the subaltern (309). Though the philosophical problem of appropriating the subaltern in a different language means that there are limits to “Ghosh’s text as a narrative of empowerment” (330), it nevertheless points to the possibility of articulating subaltern agency by showing that “what is ‘narrated’ is what cannot be narrated and it is narrated as what cannot be narrated” (“Amitav” 161).⁴ John Thieme also looks at Ghosh’s novel as eluding binaries, primarily Manichean ones like the ultimate one of the reader and the writer. Thereby, in the act of reading the novel, the reader is empowered to offer his own radical re-reading of essentialist notions of discrete subjectivity and origins (“Discoverer”). Pramod Nayar analyses the novel in the light of Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘rhizome’ and concludes that it is a classic postmodern text where characters and places, seen as singularities, actually turn out to be unstable categories. To him, the novel is an extremely decentred text and no character, location, interpretation etc. can lay claim as the ultimate repository of information and meaning. It is a rhizome, without roots, where an excess of routes are endlessly linked in “a continuous multiplicity” (“Ontology” 175).

Though awarded the Arthur C. Clarke Prize for the best work of science fiction, criticism on *The Calcutta Chromosome* somehow centered more on the construction and narrativization of subaltern subjectivity. In considering the novel as an instance of “Postcolonial Science Fiction,” Claire Chambers’ paper makes a refreshingly new intervention by locating the novel within the larger debates that thoroughly interrogate the culturally coded nature of ‘science’ and ‘technology’. In elevating the “counter-science” of a bunch of folk-medicine practitioners to the status of ‘science’, Ghosh problematises the fundamental definition of science in science fiction. This then affords him the leverage to subversively play around with the form of science fiction, a canonical Western form that straddles the two worlds of empiricism and speculation. Chambers also opines that the novel is a “revisionist text” because it takes a minor character, Lutchman, from the margins of Ross’s *Memoirs* and “pushes him centre-stage” (“Postcolonial” 61). Suchitra Mathur brings a female perspective to this debate and considers that the representation of the counter-

scientific cult and their practices not only point to an “androgynous collaboration” but also to something “supra-human” that encompasses the human, animal and mechanical worlds (135).

Pico Iyer’s review of *The Glass Palace* that appeared in *The New York Review of Books* still remains a definitive piece of critique of the novel. One of the earliest reviewers to draw attention to the grand and sweeping scale of this “multigenerational epic,” Iyer is not thoroughly convinced of the novel’s political argument that seems to lay the evils plaguing the Indian subcontinent at the doors of British colonialism. Though aware that it is not fair to judge a novel by its political argument, Iyer finds that “its insistent, highly contemporary attack on the empire” actually gives the huge canvas of the novel “a sense of shape and direction” (28). Rohini Mokashi-Punekar finds that in the novel there is a profound imbalance between the aesthetics of writing and the politics of the text. In her opinion the novel never makes a concerted effort to sufficiently interiorize the lives of the characters nor does it attempt to connect the psychological moorings of the characters to certain sociological structures. A “terribly flat narrative” suffering “from a relentless lack of interiority” (56), *The Glass Palace* puts her in a tricky situation that asks her “to approve a novel for its politics and critique it for its writing” (52-53). In her broad-based essay on the novel, Rukmini Bhaya Nair offers reflections on the photographic accuracy and documentary method, the various family portraits and the diligence with which the research part has been worked out. She also points out flaws in the presence of a large body of coincidences in the historical narrative which constitute the few occasional slips that the novelist makes (Nair 173).

Since there is hardly any critical material available on *The Hungry Tide* and the very recently released *Sea of Poppies* except as book reviews, they will not be considered here. The formal characteristics of the novel require that the persona of the narrator serves as a sort of smokescreen behind which is hidden the personality of the novelist. The two may be conflated only at great peril to the work itself. How does the novelist or the creative writer express herself/himself then, unmediated by the persona of the narrator? Bernard Shaw famously wrote ‘prefaces’ and ‘epilogues’ to his plays. Ghosh does what most of his contemporaries do: write non-fictional essays and give

interviews. He makes some very important points in his interviews and non-fiction. For instance, in his excellent interview with Chambers, Ghosh says that he looks at the novel form as “the overarching form” that “overarches fiction, and non-fiction, and history, the present, the past” (Chambers, “Absolute” 32). There have been other very good interviews, notably the one with Silva and Tickell (Silva and Tickell “Interview”), one with Frederick Luis Aldama (Aldama “Interview”), and one with Vijay Kumar (Kumar “Postcolonial”). Inevitably, the issues and concerns of the novels spill over into the interviews and parts of them are used here to substantiate arguments.

The first book on Ghosh was a collection of critical essays edited by R. K. Dhawan and published in India (Dhawan *Novels*). Since many essays in the book were comparative studies, the book initially helped position Ghosh within IWE, a fact attested by Dhawan’s astute Introduction to the book. This trend was continued by Indira Bhatt and Indira Nityanandam’s edited volume on the fiction of Ghosh (Bhatt and Nityanandam *Fiction*). Apart from these, there have also been edited volumes of critical essays mainly on *The Shadow Lines* as it happens to be a set text prescribed in many Indian universities. Brinda Bose’s edited volume, essays from which have already been discussed, comes with an excellent introduction that comprehensively looks at Ghosh’s oeuvre from the perspective of recurring themes—nationalism, identity, colonialism, migration etc (Bose “Introduction”). Bose contends that Ghosh’s public pronouncements in interviews about his apolitical stand runs contrary to the overtly political component of his novels, which actually secure for him a distinctive position within IWE.

Tabish Khair’s edited volume on Ghosh brought together some excellent critical essays on Ghosh’s work, most notably Robert Dixon’s essay originally published in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. Dixon’s assessment of Ghosh’s work (up to *In An Antique Land*) in the light of developments in anthropology, ‘global theory’, and the Subaltern Studies project is one of the most comprehensive assessments. Dixon especially offers a very favourable reading of *In An Antique Land* arguing that Ghosh’s sufficiently nuanced writing, the situated nature of his anthropological enquiry, and his refusal to draw upon the postmodern

theoretical resources of the West arrest the slide towards essentialism with which the project of recovery of the subaltern is inevitably fraught. In his opinion, “Amitav Ghosh might be travelling *in* the West, but . . . not travelling *with* the West” (34, italics in original).

The first full-length book on Ghosh by John C. Hawley is part of the series *Contemporary Indian Writers in English*. An excellent introduction to the work of Ghosh, it lays out the recurring themes, issues and concerns in Ghosh and attempts to wrestle critically with these issues. Hawley looks at much of Ghosh’s work as displaying an “abiding interest in listening to the voice of the anonymous individual, the typical person who is unrecorded in “history”—an obscure slave and his master in *In An Antique Land*, a mysterious urchin living in an Indian train station in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, an overlooked fisherman in *The Hungry Tide*” (16). Clearly, Hawley is referring to Ghosh’s preoccupation with recovering the subaltern voice in the context of his concern for and engagement with related issues in the postcolonial political scenario. Through his monograph, Hawley firmly situates Ghosh as an Indian writer with a South Asian sensibility and outlook ready to negotiate with categories like the ‘Commonwealth’. The monograph contains an interview with Ghosh where the novelist makes some very interesting connections.⁵

A part of *Contemporary World Writers* series, Anshuman Mondal’s monograph *Amitav Ghosh* contains brilliant expositions of Ghosh’s individual works examined in the light of recent developments in postmodern and postcolonial theory. Some of the issues the book critically engages with are the construction of identity of the colonized native subject (*The Glass Palace*); the sites of knowledge production in colonial India (*The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*); the profoundly problematic incorporation of modern institutions like ‘science’ and ‘nation’ within a colonial and subsequently postcolonial context; Ghosh’s espousal of a differential history (*In An Antique Land*) etc. In an essay published in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* in 2003, Mondal articulates similar concerns with the construction of identity in Ghosh that is predicated on postcolonialism’s ambivalent relation to modernity. Discussing *The Shadow Lines* and *In An Antique Land*, Mondal discovers that Ghosh’s engagement with national identity, differential history and

syncretic religion is mediated by the realization that “(I)f modernity brought colonialism then it also brought the epistemology and vocabulary of nationalism with which the anti-colonial movements successfully articulated a discourse of difference from Europe” (“Allegories” 26). According to Mondal, Ghosh attempts to fashion a differential history as a challenge to the dominant historiography of the West that looks at the unarmed character of the medieval Indian Ocean trade as a lack. However, Mondal unearths constant slippages as in his opinion, Ghosh takes recourse to the ‘given categories’ of those discourses he is out to critique (23-25). Mondal brings this understanding to bear on his monograph in analyzing Ghosh’s work that sees a “crucial ambivalent tension” “between a postmodern postcolonialism which seeks to challenge and dismantle the ideological and institutional parameters of modernity, and a humanist postcolonialism that seeks to keep them largely intact” (*Amitav* 132). In his opinion, Ghosh is practising a “politics of ambivalence” the importance of which lies “not so much in its inherent political value or otherwise but rather in the way it offers us a means of revising what politics might mean in a globalised, post-colonial world” (*Amitav* 178). In a way, Mondal hints that the categories of discourse may have to be slightly altered in order to better appreciate the ambivalent work of Ghosh.

III

Ghosh is known to dislike the term ‘postcolonial’, but the critical literature surveyed in the foregoing section firmly locates his work in the colonial/postcolonial context and experience. A substantially large body of criticism on Ghosh has emanated mainly from the Indian subcontinent, and an equally large number of essays written by academics situated in the West have been published mainly in journals that deal with postcolonial and Commonwealth literatures. In so far as colonialism can be understood as emanating from the philosophy of ‘modernity’, Ghosh’s work can actually be interpreted as an engagement with modernity and all its attendant ramifications: colonialism, nation, science, and the manifestations of these in disciplines such as history, anthropology etc. He engages with the problematic aspects of these visible institutions of modernity and attempts to offer alternatives.

The critical literature available on Ghosh is primarily concerned with issues of postcoloniality. Even as some studies take cognizance of formal devices used by Ghosh, there has not been any sustained attempt at analyzing how Ghosh goes about incorporating his explorations of the issues; there is lesser critical engagement with the processes and choice of narrative strategy that is involved in the creative exercise. It is possible to see that Ghosh collapses boundaries, but how it is done has remained largely unexplored. Some critical studies have taken this up by focusing on the narrative structure of a particular book, but a focused and rigorous discussion of Ghosh's use of narrative strategy in his fiction has never been attempted. In other words, while 'why' and 'what' have been privileged, 'how' has been relatively neglected and marginalized.

The present study hopes to make a crucial intervention by looking closely at the narrative strategies employed by Ghosh in his fiction. It proposes that while the issues, debates and concerns raised in Ghosh's novels are contemporary and important, the centre of interest is the narrative itself. How does Ghosh incorporate in novel after novel, the anthropological and researched data within the framework of the narrative of the novel? How does he connect the wealth of information to the particular stories of individuals and the lived experience of his characters? This study also proposes to look at the reciprocity and complementarity of 'form' and 'content' in ways to see how one generates and feeds into the other.

The core hypothesis of the present study is as follows:

In his novels, Amitav Ghosh collapses many essentialist boundaries by employing diverse narrative strategies. The boundaries are various: geographical, national, cultural, spatial and temporal, the one between form and content, and, most importantly, the boundary that defines the hierarchical terms within a binary and that between the self and the other. The strategic use of diverse narrative techniques implies that in Ghosh, the form and the content, the narrative and the narration, and the discursive and the creative seamlessly flow into each other.

The objectives of the present study are: to identify and discuss the diverse narrative strategies employed by Ghosh in his fiction and to analyze the narrative means with which he dismantles the many discrete boundaries.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The present study has followed a standard methodology of research that is characteristic of the disciplines of humanities and literature, following as it does the methodology of interpretive analysis of texts. For the purposes of the present study, the theoretical framework is based in large measure on key theoretical underpinnings of related fields of studies like narratology, narrative studies, cultural studies, subaltern studies, and ecocriticism. While the inputs from the above fields will be used, this study will be, broadly speaking, based on postcolonial theory and related reading practices. All the analyses of the diverse narrative strategies will be focalized through the postcolonial grid of interpretation.

Choice of Texts

The primary texts chosen for the study are the six novels of Ghosh: *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide*, and *Sea of Poppies*. *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome* are clubbed together in a single chapter. *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies*, both historical novels, are also discussed in one chapter, while the rest of the novels are dealt with individually in a chapter each. Since *Sea of Poppies* was published when this dissertation was being written and since it is but a part of a trilogy, its discussion is necessarily limited. *In An Antique Land* has not been considered in this study simply because it is not fiction and not a novel. In his interview with Chambers, Ghosh emphatically says that it is not a novel because he “didn’t make a single word of it.” Almost everything in it, including the conversations, came straight out of the extensive diaries he used to keep while in Egypt for his research (“Absolute” 28). Moreover, critics too are unanimous in endorsing Ghosh’s opinion that *In An Antique Land* is not a novel and therefore, this text has been left out of the scope of the present study. However, it is employed as a

supplementary text to buttress arguments as and when necessary, especially when the concerns seem particularly apposite as in the chapter on *The Hungry Tide*.

Structure of the Thesis

The present dissertation follows the following structure:

Chapter 1 Introduction

Chapter 2 Negotiating a Framework: A Contemporary Perspective on Narrative

Chapter 3 Narrative of Memory

Chapter 4 Narratives of Science

Chapter 5 Historical Narratives

Chapter 6 Ecological Narrative

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Secondary Sources: Books

Secondary Sources: Articles

Web Sources

IV

This section comprises of brief summaries of the analysis contained in all the ensuing chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 2: Negotiating a Framework: A Contemporary Perspective on Narrative

As the title suggests, this chapter makes an attempt to construct a theoretical framework, an analytical grid that provides the perspective in the study of narrative strategies carried out in the subsequent chapters. The first part of the chapter makes a critical survey of the developments in narratology through Russian formalism and French structuralism. It argues that the classic structuralist propensity for general principles at the cost of individual narratives, displayed by narratologists like Bremond, Greimas, Todorov and Prince, can be explained as an influence of linguistics' foundational concepts of 'langue' or 'deep structure' and its search for

‘universals’. The search for a universal grammar for narratives, which would ultimately explain and analyse all individual narratives, implies that narratology tracked an essentially deductive model of interpretation. This reveals an important ideological assumption of narratology: a ‘master code,’ a ‘master narrative,’ or a ‘grand narrative’ was thought to actually exist. Another important ideological assumption concerns the ‘nature’ of narrative itself: in narratological enterprises, a narrative was presumed to be an ‘ordered,’ ‘coherent’ and ‘transparent’ whole capable of representing the structures of something out there. The reading process, then, is reduced to some kind of a discovery procedure as the reader is invited to abstract and discover the embedded structures in the narrative following a master code that has already been formulated. Questioning the representational character of language, postmodern and poststructuralist critiques dislodged the ideological underpinnings of narratology on all counts: narrative universals, representational transparency of narratives, metalanguage, master code, discovery procedures etc. The ‘constructed’ nature of all representations basically means that disciplines like history and ethnography, founded on truth claims, were argued to contain elements of the narrative. The diversification of narrative through history and ethnography is then advanced through the alliance of the ‘nation’ and narrative as articulated in the critical perspectives of Benedict Anderson and Homi Bhabha, and the creative practices of novelists like Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh among others. As a theoretical and critical practice, postcolonialism advanced its own reading practices that not only consisted in writing back, but also in the recuperation of subjectivities, subject positions and histories. While a narrative engendered its own reading processes, it came to be looked upon as offering its own readings of what has gone before, a narrative may be, to which it is perhaps writing back. The chapter ends with a theoretical and analytical framework that favours a postcolonial analysis of Ghosh’s narratives drawn in large measure from poststructuralism, postmodernism, and the Subaltern Studies project, even as it occasionally borrows a few insights and methods, such as focalization for instance, from what is broadly classified as narratology.

Chapter 3: Narrative of Memory

This chapter, which takes up the analysis of the narrative strategy of *The Shadow Lines*, argues that ‘memory’ is the chief trope that informs the narrative as well as the narration of the novel. The apparent narrative strategy of the novel is the classic Dickensian realistic form in which the child narrator grows up to attain maturity, which confers on the narrative the form of the bildungsroman. Yet, this is only a frame narrative just as the use of realism is a kind of ostensible realism. The apparent formlessness and ‘plotlessness’ of the narrative too are only provisional. The hypothesis is that the actual narrative strategy of the novel is to destabilize the easy reference between an event and its representation, which is so characteristic a feature of the typical realistic narrative. The function of memory as the dominant narrative trope is explained by focusing on the dynamics that govern the complex matrix of relationship between the narrator and his cousin, Ila. Considered as a hierarchical binary, the globe-trotting cousin of the narrator is obviously the privileged one. The narrative empowers the unprivileged other by investing the narrator with the agency of memory, the faculty of perception of space, and the ability to understand the context, which are then crucially withheld from Ila. This denial, that is an indicator of a certain ‘lack’ that marks the construction of Ila’s personality, is interpreted in terms of Ashish Nandy’s reading of Kipling’s character as a cultural pathology produced by ‘deep cultural contradictions’ and Dipesh Chakrabarty’s formulation of ‘transition narratives’ that have remained grievously incomplete. The denial of memory keeps Ila strategically out of all those sites from which the rambling, shuttling, and non-linear narrative of the novel issues forth. In a sense, it is a complete denial as she is not even accorded the privilege of narrating the episode at a pub in Calcutta that is central to the articulation of her freedom. The potentially threatening negative energy generated by the relationship between Ila and the narrator is sought to be partly offset by the narrator’s relationship with his peripatetic uncle, Tridib. This relationship, the ideological pivot of the narrative, is premised on the identification between the narrator and Tridib; the identification is so acute that the narrative has actually been focalized through Tridib. The fundamentally triadic structure—‘imagination’, ‘memory’ and ‘stories’ are the three points—of this relationship allows both to live the past in their present. The memories of an undivided home in Dhaka, of the riots

during partition and of nationalist resistance, construct for the narrator's grandmother a metaphor of militant nationalism. Her complex situation, her admiration of masculine nationalism of Western European nations, and her journey to Dhaka are employed by the narrative to deconstruct the bogey of nationalism. Finally, the chapter takes up the issue of oral narration and stories, and argues that the strategic deployment of memory as a narrative strategy through the use of rambling oral narrations mark *The Shadow Lines* as a subversive text that critiques the nation and nationalism, and offers alternative historiographies based on memory rather than on dominant institutionalized history.

Chapter 4: Narratives of Science

Ghosh's debut novel *The Circle of Reason* and his third novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* revisit questions regarding modern science and colonized societies. The category of modern/Western science has been central not only to European modernity, but also to the civilizing mission of the British: it underpinned the overtly stated and assumed superiority of the colonizers' culture. The widespread perception that modern science was born in the nations of Europe and was then disseminated in colonized societies was institutionalized by George Basalla's "diffusionist model" of the spread of Western science. Historians of science have fiercely contested such a claim that implicitly posits Western science as an 'objective' and 'value-neutral' monolith that has historically de-subjectified native contributors and contributions. In *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh displays a critical engagement with science, rationality and modernity in the light of the Enlightenment, and their incorporation into an Indian modernity in the space and time of colonialism. At one level, the repetitive and cyclical structure of the narrative tries to subvert the linear development and progress implicit in the understanding of the onward march of Western reason. The narrative employs one of the chief characters, Balaram, as a narrative strategy: a professed crusader of science and scientific rationality, he practices phrenology, a branch of colonial science once popular among administrators zealous of branding communities, but later discredited as pseudo-science. This engagement, which is mainly at the level of themes and issues, is deepened in *The Calcutta Chromosome* as this novel uses the

form of science fiction, a canonical Western genre that is predicated upon the exploits of science.

Ghosh's third novel is a kind of revisionist rewriting of Ronald Ross's *Memoirs*. Ross's status as a pioneering scientist studying the malarial parasite is a result of the epistemological tradition of the West that views knowledge as the sole preserve of an autonomous individual subject. Hence, Ghosh's novel uses the narrative strategy of diffusing knowledge across a community, thereby undermining the idea of an autonomous and independent subject. For this, the narrative decentres the category of 'discovery' from within by blurring the distinction between the discoverer and the discovered. The decentering of the category of discovery and the construction of the community seen as the repository of knowledge are then viewed as constituting an epistemological break. The high point of the novel is the way in which Ghosh plays around with the genre of science fiction. The ideological requirements of the genre of science fiction such as a piece of dazzling technology, a premise, and a forward-looking progressivist gaze are parodied in such a fashion that they basically undermine the status of science in science fiction. The science or 'counter-science' practiced by the counter-scientific group in Ghosh's novel is represented in a manner that its inclusiveness explodes the myth of alterity/otherness which is a characteristic feature of the genre of science fiction. The chapter argues that Ghosh's use of this classic Western genre subverts and problematises fundamentally the rigid borders drawn around science. The subversive use of the science fiction genre is closely tied up with the recovery of the agency of subaltern native laboratory assistants like Lutchman whose contributions to the malaria research of Ross have been erased by the scientist. However, since the recovery of subaltern subjectivity and consciousness is fraught with fundamental theoretical slippages, Ghosh is called upon to drastically reconfigure the terms of discourse. 'Absence' and 'silence', two negative terms of the dominant discourse, are suitably vested with agency so as to narrate and thereby recover subaltern and native contributions in the development of science.

Chapter 5: Historical Narratives

Ghosh's engagement with history forms a part of the larger picture: the historical fact of the colonial encounter underpins novels in IWE to such an extent

that they can be said to be “handcuffed to history” to use Rushdie’s telling phrase. Novelistic engagements with history have been a site for fierce resistance and contestation, a way of writing back and correcting the excess that most colonial accounts suffer from. For Ghosh, this engagement is constituted in ‘which’ past(s) is chosen to be remembered and ‘how’ it is remembered. In (re)visiting the historical backwaters of regions such as Burma from its last days of monarchy and imminent British conquest to the present day military state of Myanmar via the largely unrepresented Southeast Asian theatre of the Second World War, Ghosh in *The Glass Palace* chooses nineteenth-century Victorian realism as the narrative device. This chapter argues that the narrative is wedded to an epic mode of narration, and realism in this historical narrative is perhaps forced to sacrifice the internalization of the lived experience of characters at the cost of an omniscient narrative voice that is detached, distanced, and authoritative. In Bakhtinian terms, the novel may be interpreted as ‘monologic’ as the individual characters are denied independent subject positions, and are reduced to the status of ‘objects’ of the authorial/narratorial discourse. The critique of British colonialism is articulated not through internalized experiences of the characters, but by tracing the contours of larger historical forces. Ghosh’s use of a highly linear novelistic form that has historically been associated with the Empire disturbs the delicate balance between ‘politics’ and ‘poetics’ that is otherwise a hallmark of his novels. *Sea of Poppies* is also a historical narrative, but it employs a slightly different brand of realism, one that is inflected with a hardly perceptible magic realist strain in its evocation of subaltern lives. The novel makes a conscious attempt at representing faithfully the overall ambience of nineteenth-century India and the traffic on the Indian Ocean. The novel’s evocation of the sights and sounds of a bygone era is powerful and justifiably vies with any historical narrative of Walter Scott for instance. Marked by an absence of a detached epic narrative voice, this novel can be said to be highly ‘dialogic’ and ‘polyphonic’ as the characters have their own independent subject positions. The characters have been sufficiently interiorized and the interest is sustained by their peculiar predicaments and stories. With *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh can justifiably claim that his interest actually lies in characters, narratives, stories, and in particular predicaments that his characters are caught.

Chapter 6: Ecological Narrative

The regular entreaties calling for an expansion of the scope of postcolonial studies into newer areas has led some critics to map territories where postcolonialism and ecocriticism may converge as well as diverge. Robert Nixon points out “four main schisms between the dominant concerns of postcolonialists and ecocritics” that ensure a relationship of “reciprocal indifference or mistrust” (235). The three fields of postcolonialism, ecocriticism and environmentalism constitute an apparent impasse. This chapter considers the question whether *The Hungry Tide*, which seemingly straddles these three fields, offers a way out of this impasse. There are multiple contexts in *The Hungry Tide*: a classic postcolonial context of a twice-displaced community in conflict with the state asserting its right over natural resources and the environment; the context of a fringe and marginalized community in the Sundarbans eking out a precarious existence on the peripheries of the Indian nation; and an Indian American animal rights activist whose world view, fashioned by the idiom of a large section of Western environmentalists, threatens to snap the delicate bond that exists between man and nature/animal in the tide country. Central to the narrative scheme of the novel is the evolving relationship between Piya and Fokir: while the former represents the ‘biocentric’ perspective of ecocriticism, the latter stands for the ‘anthropocentric’ perspective of postcolonialism. As the relationship develops beyond the threatening divergences of the two fields, the two characters grow out of their respective ‘isms’ and seize control of their selves as fictionally realized individuals. The ethnographic content of this novel, that includes the narration of a popular legend and the narration of the syncretic practices of the inhabitants, combines the use of a realism that is tempered with a certain mythic quality even as it aspires to the photographic accuracy of a documentary film. Again, the use of documentary realism is tricky for the novelist as it comes laden with the questions of representation, and it seems to answer the ecocritics’ call of ‘back to realism’. But the adoption of documentary realism for a story and setting that is evoked poetically is dictated not so much by the ecocritical slant of the novel as by the magical but harsh reality of the Sundarbans and the context of the marginalized communities. The narrative of *The Hungry Tide* thus attempts to provisionally chart a creative space where the impasse between postcolonialism, ecocriticism and environmentalism is resolved.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Ghosh by his own admission may have given up practising anthropology, but it is obvious that his anthropological background provides the raw content that makes his fiction. The presence of substantial amount of researched and scholarly data in Ghosh has been seen by some as threatening the delicate balance between the 'creative' and the 'discursive'. This threat is set aside most of the times because Ghosh brings the perspective of the novelist to bear upon his anthropological data. His essential interest lies in narrative, and he visualizes the anthropological raw material in terms of its potential as narrative. Without ever sacrificing the narrative in favour of his data, he strategically incorporates the anthropological material into his novels through the employment of diverse narrative techniques. Implicit here is the understanding that this involves a collapsing of the generic boundaries. The field of IWE has been mapped for quite sometime on the binary of 'realistic'/'magic realist': *Midnight's Children* as a quintessentially magic realist text occupies one extreme whereas the realism of *A Suitable Boy* (1993) is positioned at the other end of the spectrum. Other novels could be plotted on this axis and classed according to their relative distance from the nearest pole. Beginning with *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh strives to offer alternative narratives and narrative strategies. The exploration of an alternative narrative space has been an abiding contribution of Ghosh, and he has creatively expanded the boundaries of the novel genre, especially in the context of IWE. The present study concludes that Ghosh's predilection for expanding generic and narrative frameworks is reflected in his ability to collapse boundaries from within. This is a deconstructive principle which undermines the system of binaries to the extent that the classic humanist duality of the 'self' and the 'other' breaks down into a borderless, liminal space.

Chapter 2

Negotiating a Framework: A Contemporary Perspective on Narrative

Narratology, the theory and systematic study of narrative, witnessed a massive expansion as well as transformation during the last century. Beginning with structuralist poetics, narratology arrived at the threshold of postcolonial studies meandering its way through poststructuralist, deconstructionist, Marxist and new historicist critiques and formulations. In this long and at times tortuous journey, narratology underwent transformations such that there remains hardly any semblance between the early structuralist practices and the late new historicist practices. This chapter will attempt to track narratology's journey through the twentieth century, and also discuss significant insights that this field of study gained in the last century. Though a diachronic account is inevitable, the thrust areas will be synchronically dealt with in a manner that clearly identifies the shifts in thinking about and the perception of narrative and its nature. It will not attempt an analysis of any narrative, but will trace developments in the analyses and interpretations of narratives with a dedicated focus on the assumptions, ideological or otherwise, that underpin these.

Novelists like Amitav Ghosh have experimented with narrative in such fundamental ways that a strictly structuralist-narratological framework of analysis is rendered inadequate. Although Ghosh's works consistently draw attention to their form, an analysis of *only* the mechanics of the form cannot do justice to his oeuvre. The *dramatis personae*, issues, contexts and situations as presented through different forms and narratives actually uphold his reputation as a novelist. This chapter will therefore attempt to construct a theoretical framework of analysis, an interpretive grid that will test, and be tested against, the individual novels of Ghosh in the subsequent chapters. Since the attempted framework will be constructed by tracing the developments in narratology and related fields of study, the framework of analysis so evolved will not be rigid and straitjacketed. In fact, the framework may even partly anticipate and explain the narratives used by Ghosh. This claim might seem to be somewhat preposterous because theory, in the general understanding of the term, carries a sense of the aftermath as it follows the 'event'. But this assertion seems apt

as one of the objectives of the present study is to establish that the ‘creative’ and the ‘discursive’ flow into each other in the novels of Ghosh.⁶

Section I of this chapter tracks the developments in narratology beginning with Vladimir Propp up to Gérard Genette through Roland Barthes, Gerald Prince and others. Section II looks at linguistics as providing the foundational assumptions of narratology, and the implications that this has for narratology and the nature of narrative. Section III takes up briefly Bakhtin’s critique of Russian formalism and French structuralism. Section IV discusses the poststructuralist and postmodern critiques of metalanguage, history and Western historiography, and the nation. Section V focuses exclusively on the decentering of the nation and its narration through narrative. Section VI takes up for discussion postcolonial criticism, the project of subaltern historiography, and the construction of an analytical and evaluative frame. Section VII briefly introduces the various theoretical inputs drawn from the foregoing sections, which are employed for examining the various narrative strategies in Ghosh’s novels in the chapters that follow.

I

Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale*—published first in Russian in 1928—is generally regarded as one of the first texts inaugurating narratology though the term itself was first proposed by Tzvetan Todorov in 1969. Propp, highly critical of the prevailing classification of Russian folktales into categories according to the chief character (based on the Aarne-Thompson tale types), proposed his functional model, which is partly a response to this. Propp investigated the narrative structures of Russian fairytales, analyzed characters as mere participants in actions or events, and reduced his object of investigation to thirty-one ‘functions’ and seven ‘spheres of action’. Functions, in the Proppian universe, designate what common readers would normally understand as actions. In his words, a function is “an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action” (21). Propp’s task was to abstract the invariant elements across the narratives that he had chosen without emphasizing the variable elements. For Propp *what* was the invariant element that he had discovered across narratives while *who* and *how* were the variables. To understand Propp’s analysis in a better way, it would be rewarding to

know some of the functions that he identifies. For instance, given below are two descriptions of actions that Propp takes from two tales.

Event 1 A Tsar gives an eagle to a brave man. The eagle carries off the brave man to another kingdom.

Event 2 A sorcerer gives a little boat to Ivan. The boat carries Ivan to another kingdom.

Now, in Propp's analysis, both these events have two functions represented by the two sentences in each: receipt of an (magical) object; and transfer or displacement in space with the help of that object. The first function is represented by the verb 'gives' while the second is represented by the verb 'carries (off)'. The verbs in the above illustration point not only to the functionalist aspect of the whole Proppian enterprise, but also validate the point, already raised, that for Propp *what* was more important than *how* or *who*. In other words, the functions represented by the verbs are the invariant elements while the dramatis personae and objects—'tsar', 'brave man', 'Ivan', 'eagle', 'boat' etc.—are the variables. The seven spheres of actions that Propp identifies are: "villain, donor (provider), helper, princess (sought-after person) and her father, dispatcher, hero (seeker or victim), false hero" (Selden et al 78). The functions identified above are the fourteenth and the fifteenth in Propp's list. It is not necessary for all the thirty-one functions to occur at the same time in any particular tale, but it is extremely important to note that in the Proppian model, the functions always occur in the given sequence. For example, function fourteen has to follow function thirteen. Thus, in a way, Propp's model was highly deterministic. Nevertheless, it was a formalist-structuralist enterprise per se, and one that influenced many later models.⁷

Vladimir Propp, despite his path-breaking analysis, remained unknown in the academic and literary circles of the West. This was mainly because the Russian language was inaccessible to Western academia. One of the earliest recorded references to *Morphology* by a distinguished academic or critic situated in the West is in the year 1945 by Roman Jakobson (Dundes 39). Thirteen years after this, i.e. in 1958, the English translation of *Morphology* was published, and then the book became available to many scholars in Western Europe and America. One of the earliest critics to write a favourable review of the book was Lévi-Strauss, the French structuralist anthropologist who employed linguistic tools to unearth deep and

embedded structures in myths, rituals, customs and culture at large. Lévi-Strauss's analyses of American-Indian myths and the Oedipal myth are some of the finest and most sustained examples of structuralist analysis. It is interesting to note that by the time he came across Propp's *Morphology*, Lévi-Strauss had already embarked on his grand structuralist study of myths (Dundes 39). Lévi-Strauss was, on the whole, highly appreciative of Propp's work. However, he critiqued Propp on three counts: for choosing wondertales instead of myths; for not arranging the thirty-one functions into a neat system or structure through a pattern of oppositions; and for profligacy ('economy' is a cardinal principle in Structuralism).⁸ For Lévi-Strauss, the cardinal principle of structuralist praxis was the division of the object of study into binary oppositions, illustrated by the following statement: "all mythemes of whatever kind, must, generally speaking, lend themselves to binary operations, since such operations are an inherent feature of the means invented by nature to make possible the functioning of language and thought" (qtd. in Dundes 40). Lévi-Strauss's criticism of Propp's model, viz. that the functions and the spheres of action were not organized into a neat system which could have been achieved by arranging them into oppositional structures, is a result of such a belief. Moreover, for Lévi-Strauss, the 'syntagmatic' structure was superficial while the 'paradigmatic' structure was the one invested with real meaning and significance. His critique was also the result of the highly syntagmatic nature of Propp's model (notice the sequential nature of the functions). Lévi-Strauss's structuralist and anthropological praxis is significant since it explored the existence of narrativity and narrative structures outside the traditional spaces that were thought to possess narrativity and narrative structures. His contribution may be called historic on two counts: first, for applying essentially linguistic tools to analyze non-linguistic practices; and for initiating what Mark Currie calls diversification in narratology (2).

Claude Bremond and A. J. Greimas worked upon Vladimir Propp's model vigorously. Bremond was apprehensive of the 'determinism' that, in his opinion, accompanied Propp's analysis, and he went on to advance a developed model. It is another matter altogether if Bremond and the other structuralists succeeded in dispelling such apprehensions from their own analyses. In 1966, in the eighth issue of *Communications*, Bremond contributed an essay entitled "The Logic of Possible

Narratives”, wherein he develops a model that moves away from a temporal orientation, so marked in the Proppian model, towards a model based largely on a logical orientation.⁹ This model consists of three stages, namely, “virtuality,” “actualization” and “attained result” (Bremond 387-88), that roughly correspond, in general parlance, with “possibility (or potentiality), process, and outcome” (Rimmon-Kenan 22), or “possibility or likelihood of action,” “action in process,” and “action accomplished and results achieved” (Blanchard 4). To dispel the overt determinism of Propp’s model, Bremond introduces bifurcation at every stage of the action, so that the third stage may result in either success or failure. Here, the shift from an overtly sequential, chronological and syntagmatic axis to a paradigmatic and logical one can be discerned. Further, in Propp, function was defined from the point of view of outcome, result and achievement. This practically excluded many elements from the range of the definition and hence, from the analysis itself. Bremond’s introduction of the concept of virtuality brought in alternative, and hitherto unregistered, elements within the ambit of narrative analysis. Thus, Bremond’s model greatly widened the scope of narrative analysis over the one advanced by Propp. At the same time, it is important to note that though Bremond did not take recourse to the principle of binary oppositions (except the bifurcations), his model is more structuralist than Propp’s could ever claim to be.

From a purely structuralist point of view, probably there is none that can surpass the model advanced by the Lithuanian Algirdas J. Greimas. Taking Propp as the starting point, Greimas advanced an essentially algebraic model of narrative analysis in *Structural Semantics*. First published in French in 1966 as *Sémantique Structurale*, this book proposes a vastly reduced model of narrative analysis. The principle of economy is central to Greimas’s enterprise as he reduces the basic matrix of all narratives to a relational operation of only six ‘actants’—Subject, Object, Sender, Receiver, Helper and Opponent. Selden et al state that “Greimas aims to arrive at the universal ‘grammar’ of narrative by applying to it a semantic analysis of sentence structure” (78); Hans Bertens argues that while Propp’s “model still works with recognizable actors, or *dramatis personae*” Greimas’s model, developed “at a high level of abstraction, . . . wants to describe the basic structure that allows meaning to emerge” (69, italics in original). Indeed, the movement from Propp’s partly

structuralist model to a fully developed structuralist model is accomplished in Greimas without much fuss. Greimas's analysis is remarkable on many counts: for providing a model that is more akin to algebra; for reducing the basic matrix of all narratives to a relational operation of only six actants; and for introducing the semantic aspect into structural analysis of narrative. Greimas also introduced a fairly large number of new terms in his analysis that made his structuralism look "highly elaborate and mathematical" (Sturrock 116). Of the new terms that were introduced, actants (as opposed to actors) has been the most often quoted, and it is this term that has become symptomatic of Greimas. Consequently, his model is also referred to as the 'actantial' model. Actants are purely formal, structural units and may be conceived as the invariant entities across a broad spectrum of narratives. Actors, on the other hand, are the visible components that vary. The relation between actant(s) and actor(s) in Greimas's analysis forms a very interesting part of his whole project. This relational aspect was the one major feature glaringly missing from Propp, and which formed the basis of the quintessential structuralist Lévi-Strauss's critique.

There were other structuralists who were also working, more or less, on the same lines. Tzvetan Todorov, the Bulgarian, who introduced the term narratology, also contributed an essay "Les catégories du récit littéraire" to the eighth issue of *Communications*. Todorov's classic structuralist study of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, entitled *The Grammar of the Decameron*, enunciates, literally speaking, a grammar of narratives.¹⁰ In this work, Todorov looks at the characters as nouns, their attributes as adjectives, and their actions as verbs. Each story, thus, becomes an extended sentence. The title of this work may be misleading in that it may suggest that the focus of the book is Boccaccio's *Decameron*. In that sense, the book would purport to go against the then dominant contemporary trend that emphasized on enunciating general principles rather than enunciating principles for analysis of particular narratives. Despite its title, the book actually is "Todorov's most sustained effort to delineate the 'structure of narrative in general' by a systematic application of linguistic terms to social behaviour" (Onega, "Structuralism" 266). This approach has been termed the 'story' approach and is opposed to the 'discourse' approach. Todorov's essay "The Typology of Detective Fiction" (1966) is a fine example of structuralist analysis of narrative and it takes up for analysis a genre that is quite amenable to structuralist

analysis. Lodge and Wood comment that the essay “exemplifies the characteristic structuralist pursuit of explanatory models with which masses of literary data may be classified and explained” (137). Another very important contributor to the ‘story’ approach was Gerald Prince. Prince’s idea of ‘minimal story’ based on temporal succession and causality in *A Grammar of Stories* (1973) has been an important contribution to the field. Prince uses this to advance a description of narrative in his essay “Aspects of a Grammar of Narrative”: “narrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events in a time sequence” (50). In the same essay, Prince tries to formulate one general rule or grammar for all narratives in terms of “Kernel Narratives,” “Rewrite Rules” and “Generalized Transformations” (51-55). This essay is remarkable for spelling out distinctly, and very forcefully, the ‘objective’ nature of the whole structuralist enterprise:

(T)he grammar is not concerned with describing the greatness, or the beauty, or the profundity, or the interest of narrative: there are no great, or beautiful, or profound, or trivial narratives for a grammar; there are only narratives. (50)

It has been a persistent criticism against structuralism that it is not only ahistorical and anti-humanistic, but also culturally and politically very naïve and innocent. In bracketing off the object of investigation from the traditional attendant concerns like biography and history, structuralism had an affinity with the Anglo-American new critical tradition. Moreover, it shared with the new critical tradition a bias for analysis rather than evaluation. Besides being indifferent to the cultural value of its object of investigation, it also did not care much whether any particular narrative (or a piece of literature) was an example of great literature or not (Eagleton, *Literary* 83). The implications of this naiveté and innocence were huge, both for structuralism and for the objects of its investigation.

In 1972, in the form of *Narrative Discourse*, Gérard Genette offers probably the best-known text of narratology written from the perspective of the discourse approach. This approach, unlike the story approach, does not aim to formulate an overall and all-encompassing grammar of narrative. Rather, this approach pays close attention to the workings of individual narratives. Though Genette introduced several new terms like ‘homodiegetic’, ‘heterodiegetic’ ‘analepsis’ etc., a majority of them

are actually reformulations of old terms and concepts. Genette's study was path-breaking mainly because of his concept of 'focalization'—a theoretical distinction between 'who sees?' and 'who tells?' This was a development on the traditional 'point of view'. Genette's narratological enterprise became very influential and influenced practitioners like Meike Bal and Lubomír Doležel. Thus narratology, in the later years, shifted its focus somewhat from the abstraction of invariant elements in/across narratives to the discovery of the principles involved in particular narratives. This development took place during the 1980s, and by the close of the last century narratology came to refer exclusively to the discourse approach as practiced by Genette, and later by Bal and others (Onega, "Structuralism" 275). This was a very crucial development, especially if it is read in the light of the developments in the wake of poststructuralism. Some of the founding principles of the 'story' approach in particular, and literary structuralism in general, were called into serious questioning in the 1970s and the 1980s. What were these questions and who raised them? Before taking up what actually were these questions, it is necessary first to arrive at the founding principles of literary structuralism which the next section attempts to do.

II

This detour will begin with Jonathan Culler's essay "Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative." This essay is actually an adaptation of an earlier essay published in a special issue of *Poetics Today*.¹¹ In "Story and Discourse" Culler begins with a brief survey of the extensive and varied work done on narrative at different times and at different places. Varied as these traditions are, they all agree, according to Culler, that the theory of narrative requires a distinction between story and discourse (*Pursuit* 188-89). Much has been written about the two since E. M. Forster drew, in *Aspects of the Novel* (1926), a distinction between story and plot.¹² Forster locates the difference between the two in 'causality' and since then 'temporal succession' and 'causality' have been argued to be the main points of difference. The story/discourse or story/plot opposition has had various names: Russian formalists used 'fabula' and 'syuzhet'; Genette and other French structuralists used 'histoire' and 'recit'; Seymour Chatman used 'story' and 'discourse'; and Rimmon-Kenan used 'story' and 'text'.¹³ Culler argues that this distinction is even central to the American

tradition from Henry James to Wayne Booth. It hardly needs mention that the principle followed in this distinction is the principle of binary opposition.

In many ways, recourse to binary oppositions was central to the structuralist enterprise. Apart from the binary of story and discourse, Greimas's actantial model with six actants could also be neatly broken down into three binaries. The noted American folklorist Alan Dundes, in fact, contends that the oppositional structure was not something peculiar to myths only. Dundes argues that the oppositional structure can be seen at work in 'proverbs' ("United we stand; divided we fall"), traditional riddles and curses (46-47). Binary opposition, then, was some kind of a 'universal' and one of the tasks of the structuralist critic was to look around for its presence in the object under investigation.¹⁴ This can certainly be traced to Saussurean linguistics with its classic binaries of 'langue-parole', 'synchronic-diachronic', and 'paradigmatic-syntagmatic'.

Saussure's distinction between what he termed *langue* and *parole* is an abiding contribution to twentieth-century thought. *Langue* is the underlying system of language that is shared by every native speaker of a particular linguistic community, whereas *parole* is the actual, individual act of utterance or speech. While *langue* remains invariant, *parole* varies. It is *langue* that invests *parole* with meaning. Noam Chomsky, formulating cognitive principles during the 1950s and the 1960s, advanced the notions of 'competence' and 'performance' and the refined notions of 'deep structure' and 'surface structure'. Chomsky's notions of competence and deep structure roughly correspond to Saussure's *langue* whereas performance and surface structure correspond to *parole*. Now, if one goes back to Propp, one would find that he was more interested in discovering the invariant principles or structures that he thought every folktale possessed. For him, the actors or the *dramatis personae* were not as important as establishing some kind of a parallel and repetitive pattern within the folktales.¹⁵ What is true here for Propp is true in general for structuralist narratology: to emphasize on the invariant elements across narratives rather than on a narrative in particular. In Greimas's model also, the very sophisticated and nuanced distinction between actant and actor is, in a sense, the difference between deep structure and surface structure: while the first remains invariant, the second varies.

Abstraction, in fact, was a major tool in structuralism. The aim was to find an underlying structure that could explain every narrative. Hence, one might say, narratology was after the *langue*, the competence, or the deep structure: “(t)he attempt to describe the grammar of narratives lies at the heart of the structuralist enterprise” (Green and LeBihan 64). In an essay “Structuralism and Narrative Poetics,” Onega refers to the eighth issue of *Communications* as the “the manifesto of the emerging French structuralist group.” The ultimate goal of this group, as articulated by Onega,

was the establishment of the universal ‘grammar’ of narrative, the identification of the general rules regulating narrative discourse at large—that is, the *langue* or master code of narrative. (266, italics in original)

Structuralism’s propensity to discover general and universal principles is shared by its closely allied cousin, formalism.

The claim to universality in structuralism is especially evident in the story approach to narratology. This universality could be observed at two levels: intra-discipline and inter-discipline. At the first level, a model or a deep structure was thought to be capable of explaining every text within a field (Propp’s model for fairytales or Greimas’s for narratives). At the second level, it was thought that the structure or principle of language was capable of explaining every other field. Terry Eagleton, in an attempt to situate the shift from traditional criticism to structuralism, sums this up beautifully:

Traditional criticism had sometimes reduced the literary work to little more than a window on to the author’s psyche; structuralism seemed to make it a window on to the universal mind. (*Literary* 97)

In her article in the 1990 summer issue of *Poetics Today*, Christine Brook-Rose deliberates on the then current state of narratology. She tracks the developments in narratology through structuralism and then poststructuralism. In her opinion, the so-called ‘excesses’ of structuralism, “couched in learned words, rigorous analyses and diagrams, even mathematical or logical formulas, often turned out to be rather trivial” (283). She even attempts to locate the precise reason for the general and critical discontentment with the ‘excesses’ of structuralism: “The initial excitements and fairly rapid disappointments of narratology must have had to do with the early high

claims of universality” (283). This claim to universality was fiercely challenged in the theoretical developments since structuralism, and it has been cited as one of the major reasons for the dislodgement of structuralism (especially the ‘story’ variety).

The belief and conviction in the existence of universal langue or deep structure, which is a major ideological plank of literary structuralism, was ultimately derived from the foundational principles of Saussurean linguistics.¹⁶ The fact that narratology, and literary structuralism in general, relied heavily on the linguistic model developed by Saussure is fairly well documented. This understanding also runs through two of the earliest surveys and critiques of structuralism and Russian formalism. The second of these (chronologically speaking) is Culler’s *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* published in 1975. One of the chief concerns of Culler here, apart from a very comprehensive survey, is to present linguistics and anthropology as the base from which structuralism sprang up. The first of the two surveys is Fredric Jameson’s *The Prison House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*. It critiques the basic methodology of the two movements by laying bare the presuppositions of both. Jameson considers structuralism as an exercise in rethinking “everything through once again in terms of linguistics” (vii). Further, Jameson goes on to argue how language had actually become the object of analysis in structuralism:

The most characteristic feature of structuralist criticism lies precisely in a kind of transformation of form into content, in which the form of structuralist research ... turns into a proposition about content: literary works are about language, take the process of speech itself as their essential subject matter. (198-9)

Jameson’s critique in the lines quoted above might seem to overlap with the poststructuralist and postmodern critiques that set great store by blurring of boundaries. Form and content, traditionally seen as separate entities, coalesce in poststructuralism. (The poststructuralist critique of narratology will be taken up in section IV of this chapter.) However, Jameson actually points to a particularly strong tendency in structuralism whereby content is gradually effaced. Rather than the coalescing of form and content, structuralist praxis stood out for the appropriation of content by form. For structuralist practices, form unproblematically refers to

language: “it [structuralism] thinks everything through again as though language were its very subject matter” (Eagleton, *Literary* 91). This propensity of centering form at the expense of content is symptomatic of the anti-humanism inherent in structuralism. In structuralism the human subject, as well as the object, was replaced by the system (language) to such an extent that the underlying system became the subject itself. Moreover, as Eagleton points out, the structuralist “method is quite indifferent to the cultural value of its object” (83). Analytical rather than evaluative, it never considered whether the object of its study is an example of great literature or not. This anti-humanism is also evident in structuralism’s propensity for abstraction of general principles.

The moment now seems opportune for introducing into the debate the critical practices of Roland Barthes. His style of structuralism may be called janus faced because even as it is ensconced within structuralist practices, it looks forward to poststructuralism. *S/Z* (1970) occupies a pivotal position in the critical oeuvre of Barthes. The story approach that informed Barthes’s earlier structuralist practice (for instance “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative”) gives way here to the discourse approach as Barthes settles in favour of a single text (the short story “Sarrasine” by Balzac). Moreover, the analysis in *S/Z* shifts focus from the structure of the text in question to the reader’s active role in the production of meaning. However, Barthes begins his analysis by very succinctly enunciating the structuralist tendencies of universalizing and generalizing:

There are said to be certain Buddhists whose ascetic practices enable them to see a whole landscape in a bean. Precisely what the first analysts of narrative were attempting: to see all the world’s stories (and there have been ever so many) within a single structure: we shall, they thought, extract from each tale its model, then out of these models we shall make a grand narrative structure, which we shall reapply (for verification) to any one narrative. (3)

Apart from establishing structuralist practices already discussed—abstraction, search for deep structure or langue etc.—Barthes, in the passage quoted above, effectively says that the approach in question was deductive: devise a grand or a master model and then work top downwards to show conformity and deviation of individual

narratives on this grand or master model. The approach is also 'generative' or 'predictive' (Sturrock 109). Further, it fits perfectly with the principle of economy, a principle very dear to a linguist as well as a structuralist. 'Determinism' is another aspect that is clearly discernible in this approach. (So, Bremond's apprehension of the 'determinism' that, according to him, accompanied Propp's model could not be finally done away with.)

Narrative enjoyed an almost unchallenged centrality in literary structuralism. It is of course true that the examples mentioned here are mostly studies on/of narratives. But it is equally true that literary structuralism, for the most part, has concerned itself with narratives:

What Structuralists have examined is mainly narrative prose, for the good reason that the structure of a narrative is apparent, whereas that, say, of a literary essay is not. (Sturrock 107)

Folktales, Myths and Detective fiction have been particularly popular in structuralism. There is also a flip side to it. As Sturrock points out, "(l)iterary structuralism is open to the charge that it has tackled only what is easiest, and engaged with those structures that stand out from the rest" (107). There must be something in narrative or its structure that makes it so easily amenable to a structuralist analysis. Sturrock must have had in mind the generally held representative character of narrative when he locates the reason in the apparent structure of narrative. This appeals to our common sense also, as common sense suggests that since the character of narrative is essentially representative, the structure of the object/event that a narrative seeks to represent must also be apparent. Here, structuralism seems to ally with common sense, although it has historically displayed a "clear incompatibility with common sense" (Eagleton, *Literary* 94). The extent to which structuralism believed that the structure of narrative is apparent, that it is something 'out there', just waiting to be discovered through a reading process, will determine the answer to a more important question: 'what was the nature of narrative in structuralism?'

The answer to the last question is linked to the question of representation of reality. One of the best places to begin would again be Saussurean linguistics, not only because it supplied structuralism with tools, but also because it posed questions

on the representational character of language. Before the ideas of Saussure had become current, it was somewhat unquestioned that there existed a transparent and one-to-one relation between the linguistic sign (written word or its phonetic realization) and the object 'out there', i.e. in the 'real' world. Meaning was thought to reside midway between the linguistic world and the real world. Ferdinand de Saussure with his formulations, which were based on a division into three worlds—linguistic, real, and cognitive—changed the way language was conceived. He split the sign into 'signifier' (linguistic) and 'signified' (cognitive). The object in the real world, which used to be the chief source of meaning, was termed as the 'referent'. Saussure went on to suggest something radical: meaning had nothing to do with the referent i.e. the real world; rather, it was the product of the relation between the 'signifier' (linguistic world) and the 'signified' (cognitive world). Thus, by bracketing off the two worlds from the real world, Saussure attempted to establish that language is a system, and that it is self-sufficient and independent. This thesis had grave implications for language. The traditional (and commonsensical) notion that language represented external reality was not only thoroughly challenged, it was even argued that reality was not reflected by language but 'produced' by it. In a sense, meaning and reality produced by language were 'constructed'. It is fairly obvious that in structuralism, language had lost its essentially representative character. Did narrative still retain its representative character? The answer is not an emphatic yes. Had this been the case, then structuralist narratology would certainly have taken up for analysis 'subjective' things like the psychology of a character or the 'theme' of novel, things that a narrative is traditionally understood to represent. This hardly ever happened. The human subject (both the *dramatis personae* as well as the author) was not allowed to intrude into the analysis. But then, one cannot also go to the extent of saying that there was absolutely no dilution in the representative character of narrative. The position is that the kind of foundational and ontological questions that were posed in relation to the representative character of language were never posed to narrative. Hence, in a way, the ontological base of narrative was secure in structuralism.

Surely this implies that a narrative is a transparent account that reveals the inherent structures of the object it seeks to represent. Sturrock, through a comment quoted above, would have us believe that this was one of the reasons why narrative

prose was regularly the object of structuralist analysis. If this view of narratives is granted, the reading process becomes akin to discovery procedures. In a text there are some structures, and the task of the reader and the critic is to abstract or discover those structures. The history of narratology that has been tracked so far in this study validates this point. Moreover, narratives were assumed to be very ordered and coherent. In fact, a text without order and coherence had the potential to topple the apple-cart of structuralism. Thus, narratology foundationally relied on a particular conception and perception of narrative: a narrative is transparent, ordered, coherent and apolitical.

The linguistic model of Saussure effectively functioned as the base or the foundation for a wide range of structuralist practices. It acted as a 'metasystem' that stood outside the system that it sought to investigate. In other words, it acted as a metalanguage or a metanarrative:

For the structuralist, linguistics was a metalanguage which could describe narrative, reveal its operations and mechanisms, from a stance of scientific objectivity. (Currie 47)

Now, a typical structuralist stands at a distance from the narrative at his disposal, applies the metalanguage i.e., Saussure's linguistic model to the narrative in question, and describes the internal structure, code etc. In so doing, he relies on the assumption that there is a position outside the narrative, or the text, or language itself, from which it is possible to analyse the text without colouring, effecting, diluting, or infecting the text in question. This is the foundation of a metalanguage. Thus, structuralism flourished through the 1960s and 1970s, its foundation secure in the metalanguage of Saussurean linguistics. However, the challenges and contestations began in the 1970s, especially in the form of poststructuralist and postmodern theories that were highly suspicious of 'scientific objectivity' and metalanguage.

This brief overview of narratological enterprises in structuralism is not an attempt at homogenizing and sweeping the differences under the carpet. On the contrary, differences have been recognized. Yet, one might attempt to draw out the broad or chief characteristics, and they can be put forth as follows:

- a. Narrative was taken out of its limited context of fictitious and imaginative literature and used to investigate a wide range of practices.
- b. An analysis or investigation of narrative was based on the linguistic model developed by Saussure. This has basically two implications: (i) division into binary opposites, and (ii) unearthing of deep or embedded structures.
- c. The deductive method was often used.
- d. Structuralism was after a master narrative or a grand narrative. It did really believe in the existence of master narratives.
- e. Linguistics acted as a metasystem or metalanguage.

One of the most significant outcomes of narratology was its diversification. This was to have a far-reaching effect on the later theoretical developments regarding narrative. It was also chiefly responsible for the circulation of the claim that narratives are all pervasive. Still, this hardly tells us anything about the shift in the perception of narrative. For the purposes of the discussion here, it is extremely important to track the shifts in thinking about and perception of the nature of narrative during the decades that followed as well as partly overlapped the heyday of structuralist narratology. The next section will consider Mikhail Bakhtin's critique of Russian formalism and French structuralism articulated with special reference to the aesthetics of the novel.

III

During the 1960s and 1970s, when structuralism and poststructuralism were dominant modes of critical practice, a Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin was discovered in the academic and critical circles of the West. The late discovery of the writings of Bakhtin, and his contemporaries P. N. Medvedev and V. N. Vološinov, was chiefly a consequence of the censorship in force in the post-Revolution totalitarian Russia. The major part of their works was written in the 1920s and 30s of Stalinist Russia, when Bakhtin was in exile in Kazakhstan.¹⁷ It was only in the 1970s that the extant writings of Bakhtin and his contemporaries were discovered, subsequently translated from the original Russian, and thus made available to the Anglo-American academy. Way back in the early decades of the last century, they had articulated a critique of Saussurean linguistics as well as Russian formalism. Bakhtin's critique of Saussure's views on

language can be described in terms of two sets of oppositions: ‘abstract’ vs. ‘concrete’ and ‘unitary’ vs. ‘polyphonic’. Saussure, as seen in the last section, viewed language as essentially an abstract system where the oppositional relation of one sign to the rest helped derive meaning. He discounted the diachronic aspect of language discussing chiefly the synchronic aspect of it. Thus, for Saussure, language was an ‘arbitrary’ system of “normative forms” (the term was first used by Vološinov in 1929 in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and then subsequently by Bakhtin).¹⁸ Bakhtin viewed language as a concrete and living entity at any given point of its existence. For Vološinov, Saussure’s idea of language as “a synchronic system, from the objective point of view, does not correspond to any real moment in the historical process of becoming” (qtd. in Morris 32). While discussing ‘heteroglossia’, Bakhtin has the following to say about language:

For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the ‘taste’ of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and the contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word. (Bakhtin 293)

For Bakhtin, heteroglossia is an essential condition of the language of the novel. It can be simply understood as a multiplicity of voices, points of view, intentions, ideologies, genres etc. that co-exist dialogically at any given point of language’s existence. This concrete heteroglot conception of the world is a fitting rebuttal to the abstractism inherent in the Saussurean view of linguistics.

The other opposition of unitary vs. polyphonic also strikes at the heart of some formalist-structuralist underpinnings that were ultimately derived from linguistics. For Bakhtin language “is never unitary” except “only as an abstract grammatical system of normative forms, taken in isolation from the uninterrupted process of historical becoming that is characteristic of all living languages” (Bakhtin 288). Language, for Bakhtin, is always abundantly populated by the intentions of others. The opposition to the monolithic concept of language, drawn from Saussurean linguistics can best be

explained by his concept of 'polyphony'. Bakhtin first used this concept in respect of the poetics of Dostoevsky's art. Polyphony basically means a situation within a novel that allows for the existence of multiple and independent subject voices, the authorial voice being merely one of them. This concept led Bakhtin to formulate the key principle that has become symptomatic of his critical oeuvre: the principle of 'dialogism'. Bakhtin's critical contribution, especially his critique of the Saussurean idea of language and his poetics of the novel, can be better appreciated with the help of the terms and concepts like dialogism, polyphony, heteroglossia and multi-voiced discourse. These principles indeed challenge the monolithic entity that language had become in structuralism.

The criticism of Mikhail Bakhtin occupies a strategically important place in twentieth-century criticism. Like Vladimir Propp, his fellow Russian, he was also discovered late in/by the West and may be said to have offered creative perspectives on language that were surely of immense value. This value may be said to consist of the following:

- a. At a nascent stage of formalism and structuralism, Bakhtin advanced a nuanced critique of both. The critique encompassed the practices as well as the foundational planks of formalism and structuralism.
- b. Bakhtin actually anticipated the poststructuralist critique of structuralism. Moreover, the practices of Bakhtin and his contemporaries constitute a poststructuralist instance of critiquing the system from within.
- c. Bakhtin articulated a subtle position devoid of the anti-humanism of structuralism or the aporia of poststructuralism. And this marked a break away from the increasingly sterile positions of both. He also managed not to fall back onto the humanism of the Enlightenment discourse.

Bakhtin is very important for the discussion of the present thesis, as he restricted himself to analyzing the poetics of the novel. The novel for him was the most dialogic and social of all the literary genres. And since language was shot through with the intentions of others, there was no question that the form would remain unaffected. The novel, hence, is not a genre that is neutral and apolitical. In Bakhtin the novel, or precisely the language of the novel, is very much a site where different world views and ideologies jostle for space. These different ideologies may enter the text through

one of the subject voices or the authorial voice. It is important to remember that for Bakhtin, the authorial voice is just one of the subject voices in the text. It is by no means the dominant voice. Attempts to subordinate the different subject voices as the object of the authorial voice/discourse end in converting the novel into a 'monologic' text. At any rate, the novel/narrative in Bakhtin is viewed as a political and fiercely contested representative account. This dismantles one of the main premises of structuralism and narratology that a narrative is a neutral and apolitical representation of something.

IV

As theoretical practices, structuralism and poststructuralism share, to some extent, the same temporal trajectory of development. This overlap is largely marked in the later career of structuralism, especially during the 1970s, when both developed almost simultaneously as dominant modes of critical discourse. In such a scenario, it would be naïve to consider 'post' in poststructuralism as connoting only the sense of a chronological aftermath. In fact, it can be considered as an extension of structuralism that was complementary as well as hostile. Poststructuralism's hostility to structuralism can be described on many counts. We will take up for discussion here, poststructuralism's suspicion regarding the existence of metasystems and metalanguages. Derrida articulates this through his celebrated pronouncement "*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" ("There is no outside-of-text"). Structuralism questions the assumption and belief that language reflected/revealed external reality and the outside world. By bracketing off language as a system independent of any external/real world, structuralism draws attention to the constructed nature of language: language constructs and creates rather than reveals or reflects. However structuralism fails to perceive that "if language creates, rather than reveals, the world, surely metalanguage also creates, rather than reveals, the structures of language" (Currie 47). How then is the status of metalanguage different from that of language? One thus comes back to the Derridean dictum that "*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*". Mark Currie has argued this position persuasively and he goes on to remark that "Derrida calls this a repetition and a redoubling of structuralism's basic insight" (47).

In poststructuralism, both language and metalanguage coalesce into each other. In other words, the boundaries between them are collapsed. Barthes has expressed this collapsing of boundaries in a very lucid but forceful way. The following comment, after being introduced to the philosophy of Derrida, marks Barthes's turning away from structuralism to poststructuralism:

The subject of the analysis (the critic, the scholar, the philologist) cannot in fact, without bad faith and smugness, believe he is external to the language he is describing. . . . *The only practice that is founded by the theory of the text is the text itself.* The consequence is evident: all in all, it is the whole of criticism (as a discourse held 'on' a work) which is outdated. If an author comes to speak of a past text, he can only do so by himself producing a new text ... There are no more critics, only writers. (qtd. in Currie 48-49, italics in original)

This statement, in fact, marks a key moment in theory's transition from structuralism to poststructuralism. It sees the collapsing of traditional boundaries between the text and outside-of-text that has been a favourite ploy in the hands of the poststructuralists and the postmodernists.

The implications of this shift are huge and are not simply limited to challenging the linguistic assumptions of structuralism. It calls into question several assumptions regarding narrative and its status in structuralism. A narrative can no longer be regarded as a representation of something that reveals the internal structures of that object. The structure that was attributed to a narrative has been argued to be fundamentally constructed in nature. It is projected onto the narrative or the text through the reading process. The function of the reader as a discoverer of hidden structures is seriously challenged by poststructuralism. A similar understanding informs Barthes's distinction between a 'writerly text' and a 'readerly text'. Barthes shifted the attention from the 'author' to the 'reader' and pronounced that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" ("Death" 150). Thus, the poststructuralist critique of structuralism argues that the structure and coherence detected in a narrative by a reader are actually projected onto the narrative via the reading process.

Poststructuralism was not the first site where the process of collapsing traditional boundaries—between language and metalanguage, reader and writer etc.—began. In a sense, it began in the discipline of history in the 1960s when leading philosophers of history and historiography debated “the extent to which the discipline of history is essentially a narrative mode of knowing, understanding, explaining and reconstructing the past” (G. Roberts 1). Conducted largely through the pages of the journal *History and Theory*, intense debates on this issue took place between philosophers like Louis O. Mink, W. H. Dray, W. B. Gallie, and Hayden White among others. Hayden White, one of the most well-known philosophers of history and a narrativist, argued that a text of history essentially replicates the structure of a narrative in organizing the wealth of historical data into a coherent whole. In his *Metahistory*, White enters the then current debate on history and narrative through the traditional location of literature or ‘the fictive’ vis-à-vis history. He argues that ‘the fictive’ (literature) has been traditionally located between the two poles of the ‘historical’ (empirical) and the ‘mythical’ (conceptual).¹⁹ “Literature is then viewed as being more or less *realistic*, depending on the ratio of empirical to conceptual elements contained within it” (3, italics in original). White’s methodology consists in diluting this distinction as he went on to argue that the fictive element (story) determines, to a large extent, the historical text. While discussing R. G. Collingwood’s position that historians are above all story tellers, White remarks:

What Collingwood failed to see was that no given set of causally recorded historical events can in itself constitute a story; the most it might offer to the historian are story *elements*. The events are *made* into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative descriptive strategies, and the like—in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in the emplotment of a novel or a play. (“Historical” 223, italics in original)

With the help of terms and concepts like ‘emplotment’, ‘codification’ and ‘motification’, White is able to argue that the coherence, stability and the consistency of the representation, i.e. the text of history, does not necessarily imply the coherence, stability and consistency of the historical event in question. The stability, order and

coherence of a text of history are a result of narrativization according to literary principles. In other words, one comes back again to the question of representation of the external reality or the outside world through the medium of language. The question which arises at this point is: 'What then happens to history's claim as representing the 'truth' of the past?'

In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Michel Foucault takes up the question of history's claim to 'truth', which was based on a perceived unproblematic relationship between the text of history and its referentiality to the real world that it purported to represent. Foucault challenges this self-identification of historiography with truth and instead argues that historiography is itself a discourse like any other discourse. He goes on to trace the emergence of historiography as a discourse from the epistemology of Western Enlightenment. This questioning, that was initiated by Foucault, can be said to culminate in Linda Hutcheon's question: "Is the referent of historiography ... the 'fact' or the 'event', the textualized trace or the experience itself?" (*Poetics* 153). Now, if the past is only available as a text, surely the truth claims of historiography are no more tenable. The poststructuralist critiques of Western historiography as articulated above imply that:

- a. A text of history is a discursive text.
- b. Narrative elements are central to the writing of a text of history.
- c. The traditional boundaries between history and fictional discourse have collapsed.

To substantiate the point further, it can be mentioned that it was quite common to come across expressions like 'narrative history' or 'historical narratives' in the critical output of the 1980s and the 1990s.

This point can be further substantiated by tracing the developments in the fields of anthropology and ethnography. These are humanist enterprises and their developments into full-fledged disciplines are simultaneous with the 'discovery' of new lands and their subsequent colonization. Predicated on an ideology that swore by the transparency of representation, they were thought to authentically and definitively represent the culture of the colonized. They have been largely instrumental in providing epistemological sanction for and endorsement of 'colonial types'. In the

colonial discourse, they were a powerful sign of superiority of the colonizer's culture and practices. Anthropology and ethnography, for the purposes of the present study, assume a peculiar significance. Ghosh has an academic background in anthropology and there is an abundance of anthropological and ethnographic material in his works. The related developments in other fields discussed above also questioned and contested the ideological high ground of ethnography. In his Introduction to *Writing Culture* (1986), James Clifford succinctly sums up the changes in ideological assumptions of ethnography. In his opinion, "the persistence of an ideology claiming transparency of representation and immediacy of experience" reduced writing "to method: keeping good field notes, making accurate maps, 'writing up' results" (2). He argues that the act of "writing" in ethnography should properly be considered as literary:

Literary processes—metaphor, figuration, narrative—affect the ways cultural phenomena are registered, from the first jotted 'observations,' to the completed book, to the ways these configurations 'make sense' in determined acts of reading. (4)

He points out the partial and constructed nature of ethnographic accounts and is even ready to call them fictions:

To call ethnographies fictions may raise empiricist hackles. But the word as commonly used in recent textual theory has lost its connotation of falsehood, of something merely opposed to truth. It suggests the partiality of cultural and historical truths, the ways they are systematic and exclusive. (6)

This clearly suggests that ethnography has had to climb down from its colonial high horse. According to Clifford, "the historical predicament of ethnography" is "the fact it is always caught up in the invention, not the representation, of cultures" (2). Thus, the implications of poststructuralist critiques of history and historiography (already stated above) apply in unqualified terms to anthropology and ethnography also.

The foregrounding of narrative in the critical, ideological and theoretical debates of the twentieth century as discussed above led to the view that narratives are all pervasive. Roland Barthes begins his landmark 1966 essay "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" with the following comment:

There are countless forms of narrative in the world. . . . (I)t is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative . . . Like life itself every, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural. (237)

This is one of the most forceful articulations of the claim that narratives are all pervasive. Hayden White, who refers to Barthes's statement, articulates his own position on this aspect of narrative: "To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself" ("Value" 1). White's statement is no less comprehensive than Barthes's. White goes further and says that narrative might actually be a solution to a problem of general human concern: "the problem of how to translate knowing into telling" (1). Closely allied to this is the philosopher Louis O. Mink's idea that "narrative is a primary cognitive instrument" (213). This seeming inevitability of narratives impacts literary and cultural studies which can be seen in Jonathan Culler's statement: "Literary and Cultural theory have increasingly claimed cultural centrality for narrative" (*Literary* 83). Mark Currie adopts a similar line when he says that "(i)f there is a contemporary narratological cliché it is exactly this claim that narratives are everywhere" (1). The next section will discuss the presence of narrative and narrativity in a yet different field—the nation.

V

Poststructuralism's contestation of history and the dominant modes of Western historiography was not a one-off and isolated example. It is a part of the overall critique of Western systems of thought and the modes of production of knowledge that became dominant in post-Enlightenment Europe. While history and historiography were very important components of this overall critique, the concept or the idea of the 'nation' was also equally important. The critique of the nation can be said to have followed a trajectory similar to that of history. This critique was formulated on the twin axes of 'discursivity' and 'historicity'. The attempt was to locate in time and space the actual emergence of the nation as a socio-political unit of organization in modern Europe. At the same time, theorists argued that the nation is a

discursive formation or an ‘imagined community’. The reference here is unmistakably to Benedict Anderson and his seminal work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983). Anderson locates the beginnings of national consciousness in a historically specific context—the context of “print-capitalism” (40). It can be understood as an interaction between technology, capitalism and language whose chief tools were the novel and the newspaper. Anderson outlines three distinct ways through which print-capitalism was able to lay “the bases for national consciousness” (44). He elaborates on the three ways by which “the explosive interaction between capitalism, technology and human linguistic diversity” was able to lay the bases for national consciousness (45). Summarizing his arguments, Anderson writes:

We can summarize the conclusions to be drawn from the argument thus far by saying that the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation. (46)

One of the ways, according to Anderson, was that “print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation” (44). There are two aspects to what Anderson says here: first, the nation or national consciousness seeks a teleological sanction from antiquity or from an immemorial past. Anderson, at another place, puts this beautifully in a question: “But why do nations celebrate their hoariness, not their astonishing youth?” (qtd. in Bhabha, “Dissemination” 293). The second aspect relates to the fundamentally ‘subjective’ nature of the idea of a nation. The nation, by the second half of the twentieth century, had become so ubiquitous and natural a form of socio-political organization that it was well nigh impossible to inscribe subjectivity onto its ossified and crystallized ‘objective’ form. Anderson does this with the help of Walter Benjamin’s idea of “homogenous, empty time” in which nations reside (24). He argues that the novel and the newspaper, “two forms of imagining”, create an impression of homogeneous, empty time in the minds of the readers that, in turn, helps to create a sense of a community that is contemporary and similar in experience (24). For Anderson, the novel and the newspaper are “the technical means for ‘representing’ the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation” (25, italics in original).

This influential attempt to read discursivity and historicity into the monolith of the nation has been one of the most significant critical interventions of the 1980s. From a postcolonial perspective, it has been hugely influential, in both creative as well as critical writing and has, moreover, made seminal contributions to the study of the constructions of different nationalisms in erstwhile colonies.

A point of argument at this juncture may concern the location and origin of this questioning of the objectivity and materiality of the nation. It may be seen that the poststructuralist critique of Western Enlightenment subsumed a radical questioning of all the forms, concepts and institutions that were generated in its wake. As such, the critique of the national form cannot said to have been inaugurated by Anderson alone. Without falling back on teleology and origins, it seems that the understanding of imagined/imaginary nature of the nation predated Anderson's work. As an example, one can cite the instance of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. The birth and subsequent history of the novel's narrator, Saleem Sinai, is a parable of the independence and contemporary history of the Indian nation. The narrative's construction of the Indian nation is discursive as well as subjective, and is aimed at creating, what Rushdie in his 1982 essay "Imaginary Homelands" says, "fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, indias of the mind" (*Imaginary* 10). The narrativization of the nation in *Midnight's Children* helped push the nation into the centre of the critical discourse issuing from postcolonial spaces. Many theorists have, since then, looked at the construction of the nation in different struggles against colonialism. Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (1986) considers the European origin of the idea of the nation and argues that all anticolonial nationalisms can only be looked at as 'derivative discourses.' Dipesh Chakrabarty's oft-cited stand on the derivative nature of non-European histories has also been formulated along similar lines. In his major essay "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?" Chakrabarty comments:

(I)n so far as the academic discourse of history—that is, 'history' as a discourse produced at the institutional site of the university—is concerned, 'Europe' remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian,' 'Chinese,' 'Kenyan,' and

so on. . . . In this sense, 'Indian' history itself is in a position of subalternity; one can only articulate subaltern subject positions in the name of this history. (223)

Chatterjee's and Chakrabarty's stand on derivative discourses are important insights within the field of studies broadly classified as postcolonialism.

Among the theorists of the nation, Homi K. Bhabha has exerted immense influence on poststructuralist thought. Bhabha's main contribution is the essay "Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation" which, Mark Currie thinks, "has acquired a seminal status in socio-narratology" (91). Bhabha's focus in this essay is on the "double-time of the nation" or "the disjunctive time of the nation's modernity" ("Dissemination" 294). He looks at the double-time of the nation from multiple perspectives. One of the perspectives posits the 'homogeneous' past time of the nation against its 'heterogeneous' present time. Bhabha does not restrict himself to a discussion of the nation alone, but goes beyond it to a discussion of modernity as it impinges on the construction of the nation. Thus, the homogeneity of the nation that may result in totalitarianism is countered by inscribing upon it the heterogeneity of the present. Bhabha looks at the nation as a structure of exclusion par excellence that at any moment of its existence, writes out communities and parts that it purports to represent. This refers to the essentially metonymic character of a nation where a part is made to represent the whole by employing strategies of totalisation and exclusion. Hence, the homogeneity that shields off heterogeneity. Bhabha is also concerned with questions of the nation's origins that he finds particularly ambivalent: "How does one write the nation's modernity as the event of the everyday and the advent of the epochal?" (293). Bhabha's critique, which includes references to Bakhtin's description of Goethe's *Italian Journey*, also shows how a relationship between the nation and the realistic narrative is able to create the sense of a continuous community or "'national' *vision of emergence*" (294, italics in original). The crux of Bhabha's argument can be said to lead to the following statement:

It is the mark of the ambivalence of the nation as a narrative strategy—and an apparatus of power—that it produces a continual slippage into analogous, even metonymic, categories, like the people, minorities, or

‘cultural difference’ that continually overlap in the act of writing the nation. (292)

The essay is path-breaking when it is considered from a postcolonial perspective. Especially, the exclusion and the ambivalence that attend the formation of nations have undermined the homogeneous and the stable form that nations were believed to be. The form of the nation attains a liminal status that is articulated through narrative.

The critical discourse on nation and narration has been suitably matched by creative output. Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* has already been discussed as a case in point. The fragmentation that may accompany the construction of the nation is illustrated beautifully through the narrative of Rushdie’s novel. His novel, in fact, has come to enjoy a cult status in postcolonial and postmodern writing. Amitav Ghosh is another postcolonial novelist whose work displays a serious and persistent engagement with the issues that hinge upon nation, narrative, and narrating the nation. *The Shadow Lines*, his second novel, particularly throws into relief the fissures and the ambivalences that mark the formation of the nation. The novel also creatively articulates the interstitial spaces and the in-between spaces, spaces where the borderlines dissolve and dissipate into shadow lines. In the introduction to his book *Contemporary Fiction*, Jago Morrison makes a remark that seems particularly apposite in the present context:

Contemporary fictions are anything but homogeneous. On the contrary, they are interesting precisely for their ability to locate themselves in the interstices—the spaces between national cultures, genders and histories. (7)

It is in these spaces, in these shadow lines that the nation exists in a liminal shape.

VI

We will now consider postcolonial criticism as it developed in the wake of the radical questions outlined above. The question of textual politics and textual polemics has been at the vanguard of many contemporary critical practices, most notably, postcolonial criticism. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) takes up the issue of the politics of the text. He examines, by way of example, texts that were assumed to be ‘neutral’ or ‘innocent’ as regards the whole colonial enterprise. These include novels

as well as journalistic reports. In the course of the book, Said successfully reveals the complicity of these seemingly neutral and innocent texts in unwittingly justifying and perpetuating the structure of colonialism. This is one of the fundamental arguments of *Orientalism*, and this book more than any other was responsible for inaugurating postcolonialism as a critical discourse. It of course needs to be mentioned that Said was not the first critic who drew attention to this aspect of texts. Said acknowledges his intellectual debt to Foucault's notion of discourse as postulated in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault's notion of discourse is a part of the larger poststructuralist and new historicist attempts at contextualizing and historicizing the text.

The issue of the politics of the text has been a rewarding one for postcolonial criticism. Said takes up this issue again in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) where he offers a radical rereading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. The sugar plantations in Antigua (a colony), that have been represented as peripheral in the novel in comparison to the domestic household of Bertrams' Mansfield Park in England, are argued to be the fulcrum on which the Bertrams' domestic bliss hinges. The master of the household and the owner of the sugar plantations is Sir Thomas Bertram. In the narrative, he is generally absent from home, which is Mansfield Park, to manage some problems in the running of his plantations. Once he returns—of course after restoring 'order' to his plantations—from Antigua, he sets about restoring order in his home because the young characters have turned unruly. What Said does here is to trace a pattern consisting of a set of geographical locations and a set of characters. The pattern is a parallelism between Antigua and the young (childish) characters at Mansfield Park on the one hand, and Mansfield Park and the adult (mature) Sir Thomas, on the other. By tracing this parallelism, Said establishes a homology between childhood and colonialism. This is further substantiated at the end of the novel when Fanny Price becomes the mistress at Mansfield Park. She earns the right to the mansion because she has moved from a state of childhood/childishness to a state of adulthood/maturity. The homology between childhood and colonialism informs the basic theoretical framework of Ashis Nandy's postcolonial critique in his book *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (1983). Nandy traces it back to Marx's views on India and Asiatic societies and argues that

“(s)uch a view was bound to contribute handsomely—even if inadvertently—to the racist world view and ethnocentrism that underlay colonialism” (13). He offers a comprehensive account of this homology that shows how the grand European narratives of progress visualize colonialism as a colonized and subjugated race’s progressive march from a state of childhood and primitivism to a state of adulthood and civilization (16). In Said’s reading, Fanny Price’s “small-scale movement in space” from the marginalized location of her small Portsmouth home to the center of the large mansion at Mansfield Park is made to “correspond to the larger, more openly colonial movements of Sir Thomas” (Said, *Culture* 89). Fanny’s movement, hence, is nothing short of a colonial parable.

For Said, the character of Sir Thomas is a site with immense possibilities for contestation. Through the analysis discussed above, he reads into the character of Sir Thomas the figure of a typical colonizer who is able to manage crises, both at home (inside) and abroad (outside). Thereby, he locates ‘worldliness’ in Austen’s text and also argues its complicity with colonialism:

She sees clearly that to hold and rule Mansfield Park is to hold and rule an imperial estate in close, not to say inevitable association with it. What assures the domestic tranquility and attractive harmony of one is the productivity and regulated discipline of the other. (87)

Said’s radical rereading that contextualizes the text within the matrix of power relations in colonialism, while hugely influential, has also caused cautious demurring from certain quarters. Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, for instance, are not certain that *Mansfield Park*, like other French and English realist novels, is formally and ideologically dependent on the fact of the empire (103). Nevertheless, Said’s critique performs the very necessary task of questioning the neutrality of narratives which in reality trace the interconnectedness between culture and imperialism.

Narrative has been traditionally or generally seen as having a predominantly temporal orientation so much so that there is a view, made current after Paul Ricoeur, which considers narratives essentially as instruments for the organization of time (Morrison 34). One of the major strategies adopted by Said consists in projecting the narrative from its essentially temporal axis onto the spatial and the geographical. The

geographical space in Austen's novel is visualized in terms of the sugar plantations in Caribbean Antigua and the mansion at Mansfield Park, back home in England. Said establishes a dichotomy between these two spaces separated by immense natural barriers. Antigua is represented as the outside space, abroad, and the colony on the one hand, and on the other, Mansfield Park is represented as the inside space, 'home', and the 'metropolis'. It goes without saying that historically there existed numerous links and frequent exchanges between these two spaces. In the novel, however, the only link between the two is the persona of the plantation owner, Sir Thomas. All other links, which might have been historically and socially significant, are absent from the narrative such as Sir Thomas's journeys to his plantations in Antigua. One can, in a paradoxical way, say that Sir Thomas's *absence* from Mansfield Park is *present* in the narrative while his *presence* in his plantations is *absent* from the narrative. This double bind of absence-presence is part of a larger pattern of geographical and spatial representation in the text.

The pattern of geographical representation in *Mansfield Park* consists in a double movement: while the inside, home or the metropolis is continuously centered, the outside, abroad or the colony is simultaneously pushed to the margins. This happens despite the obvious fact that the colony helps sustain the metropolis. In the whole of the novel, the plantations in Antigua are mentioned not more than half a dozen times. Moreover, the action of the narrative never shifts to Antigua. This sort of a pattern is discernible across a wide spectrum of novels in nineteenth-century England. As instances of this, Said cites examples of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Dickens's *Great Expectations* etc. In all these novels and more the empire, according to Said, "functions ... as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction, very much like the servants in grand households and in novels, whose work is taken for granted but scarcely ever more than named" (63). Thus, there is a regular effacing of the identity of the colonized space in the nineteenth-century realistic novel. This was done either by the double bind of absence-presence, or by cursory and vague references to 'outlying lands'. This tendency is carried over to the twentieth century in references like the Wilcoxes' West African rubber company in Forster's *Howard's End* and Algeria in Albert Camus's *The Outsider*. Robert Young has drawn attention to Conrad's failure to name the particular place—Congo Free

State—that serves as the setting of Conrad’s novel *Heart of Darkness* (*Postcolonialism* 25). In a way, one can reasonably claim that the empire (in the form of the colonized space or a colonized subject) has been constantly written out of narratives. The creative and discursive practices employed in these canonical narrative texts produce a complex matrix of power relations that completely replaces the historical and material dependence of the metropolis on the colony with the complete subjugation of the colony to the metropolis. Such altered priorities are symptomatic of the problems of representation. The problematisation of representation is one of the abiding contributions of postcolonial studies to contemporary theory. Nicholas Harrison acknowledges this in the following comment:

Recognizing that a ‘beautiful piece of writing’ may be shot through with delusions and brutality, those critics have sought ways in which texts, especially canonical texts from the colonizing nations, bear the traces of or get to grips with the ideology of colonialism/imperialism, and have interpreted them as challenging or promoting orthodox views of colonialism’s purposes and justifications. (2)

This effectively challenges one of narratology’s presuppositions that champions the representational character of a narrative, an aspect assumed to be grounded in an unmediated transparency of the character of representation itself.

Said’s insistence on geography and space is an attempt to rescue those places and subjectivities which have been written out of the grand narratives of European fiction. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is another theorist who offered a very influential rereading of a canonical text in her essay “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism”.²⁰ The text in question is Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, a ‘cult’ text of Western feminism. Spivak, in order to foreground the underlying colonial discourse in the novel, selects the character of the Jamaican Creole, Bertha Mason—“a figure produced by the axiomatics of imperialism” (247). She posits Bertha as the colonial double of Jane and makes an intervention by problematising Jane’s growing stature in Brontë’s narrative with a simultaneous dispossession of Bertha’s subjectivity. Spivak reads into the “human/animal” representation of Bertha the central problematic of “Europe and its not-yet-human Other” (247). By establishing this sort of a Manichean

dichotomy, Spivak persuasively argues for alternative readings of the novel going beyond conservative interpretations that have contrived to ignore the colonial/imperial problematic in the narrative (248). Spivak's reading is especially significant as it takes to task the dominant modes of Anglo-American feminism and resists the subordination of the subaltern perspective in the slant and direction offered by Western feminism.

These are not solitary instances of recuperating erased subjectivities as 'recovery', rather than discovery, has been a recurrent motif in much of postcolonial criticism. The practice of subaltern historiography as represented by the Subaltern Studies collective is a case in point.²¹ Their agenda, as articulated by Ranajit Guha in the first volume of *Subaltern Studies*, was to rectify "the élitist bias" that characterized much of colonial as well as nationalist historiography. Their methodology was two fold: to recover subaltern consciousness; and to show that it constituted "an autonomous domain" independent of the élite (Guha, "Some" 3-4). The project was not an easy one as the attempt to recover the subaltern subject and subaltern consciousness from the pages of colonial and nationalist historical discourses was fraught with theoretical as well as philosophical challenges. Gyan Prakash, articulating "the ambivalence of postcolonial criticism", refers to the "simultaneous possibility and impossibility" of a subaltern history ("Postcolonial" 9). Prakash was replying to a debate occasioned in the first place when Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" pointed to a theoretical and philosophical impossibility of the subaltern representing herself. In her perceptive assessment of the first three volumes of *Subaltern Studies*, Spivak opines that "there is always a counterpointing suggestion in the work of the group that subaltern consciousness is subject to the cathexis of the élite, that it is never fully recoverable, that it is always askew from its received signifiers, indeed that it is effaced even as it is disclosed, that it is irreducibly discursive" ("Subaltern" 339). Despite strong contestation she continued to hold on to her position, as is evident from an interview she gave in 1993:

Now, if I understand the work of the subalternists right, every moment of insurgency that they have fastened onto has been a moment when subalternity has been brought to a point of crisis. . . . We are never looking at the pure subaltern. There is, then, something of a not-

speakingness in the very notion of subalternity. (Landry and Maclean 289)

The historian Dipesh Chakrabarty's stand vis-à-vis Europe and non-European histories echoes a similar position as seen earlier. Chakrabarty is also alive to the proposition that "the project of provincializing Europe must realize within itself its own impossibility" ("Postcoloniality" 243). Yet, he calls for "a history that deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its forms, its own repressive strategies and practices" (243).

The discussion on narrative that began with Vladimir Propp has to now conclude with critical and theoretical inputs on nation, subalternity, and narrative in postcolonial studies. Through these long years narrative—its status, its perception, and its analysis—underwent tremendous changes. It is extremely difficult to succinctly summarize this journey from the 1920s to the present times, but Mark Currie has accomplished this difficult job with sophistication:

From discovery to invention, from coherence to complexity, and from poetics to politics: this is the short summary of the transition that took place in narratological theory in the 1980s. (2)

The transition that has been tracked in the foregoing pages vindicates the above comment. The status of narrative as a simple, transparent, neutral and innocent account of something has been thoroughly challenged and finally displaced. It is replaced by an understanding that is willing to look at the historical collusion of narrative with other dominant forms for perpetuating some particular structures of power and production of knowledge. It is also significant to point out that the centrality of fiction in narrative has to a large extent been diluted. There is a gradual shift away from the general and commonsensical perception of narrative—predicated on the axis of transparency of representation—to a perception that views narrative as constructed. Simultaneously, the reading process and the analysis of narratives have also been tremendously transformed. Barthes's distinction between the 'readerly' and the 'writerly' text in *S/Z* and his pronouncement on the 'death' of the author have positioned the reader at the centre of this process. Moreover, there has been a significant shift from the heyday of structuralism when the focus of analysis used to be exclusively the form and the structure of a given work, in other words, the poetics

of the text. As part of reading practices that developed through the 1980s and 1990s, critics and commentators now look at the politics of the text, and the construction of it through the poetics. While a narrative engendered its own reading processes, it came to be looked upon as offering its own readings of what has gone before, a narrative may be, to which it is perhaps writing back.

VII

The fresh departures made by postcolonial criticism and subaltern historiography have been complimented in turn by the creative writing emerging from the postcolonial space. Among the major contemporary writers Amitav Ghosh's work is informed by a nuanced understanding of the issues that have been raised so far. They engage consistently with complex issues of representation, history, subalternity, diaspora etc. This constant attempt to come to terms with these preoccupations invests Ghosh's narratives with a richness that is hard to emulate. Space and geography are central to the design of many of his novels. At the most rudimentary level, the setting of three of his novels will vindicate this. *The Circle of Reason* is set in the oil-rich Middle-East; *The Glass Palace* focuses on Burma and South-East Asia; and *The Hungry Tide* is set in the Sundarbans. All these regions have been traditionally represented in dominant narratives in the form of absences. The setting of *The Glass Palace* is especially significant as it was also a theatre of the Second World War, but neglected in dominant historiographies. The novels of Ghosh thus partly contribute to the motif of recovery. This motif is accommodated differently in *In An Antique Land* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*. The recovery motif in these two works centers around the figure of the subaltern. Written out of dominant European narratives, Ghosh attempts to rescue them from the margins and footnotes of history. In *The Calcutta Chromosome* especially, he invests the subaltern with agency. Thus, Ghosh makes an intervention through his narratives in manner similar to the Subaltern Studies collective's endeavour through discursive history.²² *In An Antique Land* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*, both generically elusive texts, shuttle freely between genres and render the discrete generic boundaries into 'shadow lines'. The generic liminality of both the texts bestows on them a postmodern aura.

The discussion in the subsequent chapters will follow a theoretical and analytical framework that favours essentially a postcolonial analysis of Ghosh's narratives. The theoretical perspectives which enable the analysis are drawn in large measure from poststructuralism, postmodernism and the Subaltern Studies project, even as the analysis occasionally borrows a few insights and methods, such as focalization for instance, from what is broadly classified as narratology. As has been stated in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, this analytical framework will not only provide a background for the analysis of Ghosh's narratives, but its own validity as an analytical frame of reference will also be tested against the object of its analysis.

The theoretical framework in the next chapter, that takes up for analysis Ghosh's second novel *The Shadow Lines*, relies primarily on Anderson's and Bhabha's formulations of the nation. The analysis borrows Anderson's ideas on the simultaneous rise of the nation and the novel, and goes on to examine Ghosh's narrative as an instance of an ostensibly realistic novel challenging the linearity of dominant discourses. The subaltern historian Dipesh Chakrabarty's ideas on derivative discourses and transition narratives will be suitably used for an exploration of the ways by which Ghosh's novel portrays human relationships and collectivities. Key theoretical inputs from Hayden White, among other historiographers, will also be employed to examine the narrative strategy of the novel that is basically centred on 'memory'. Chapter 4 looks at Ghosh's third novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* along with his debut novel *The Circle of Reason*. The framework here rests largely on the postcolonial reading practices advanced by Said and Spivak that consist in pointing out gaps and silences in dominant narratives. Deconstructionist reading practices are also employed to examine Ghosh's texts, particularly *The Calcutta Chromosome*, which is considered as offering a deconstructionist and a revisionist re-reading of an earlier narrative, the British scientist Ronald Ross's *Memoirs*. Again, inputs from Indian historians of science and the practices of the Subaltern historians are used to analyse the manner in which both the texts creatively attempt to recuperate native contributors and contributions to science, even as they are seen to make crucial interventions in contemporary debates surrounding the incorporation of science and modernity in colonized societies. For *The Calcutta Chromosome*, especially, the

double bind of absence-presence is employed to examine the ways the narrative attempts to recover marginalized subaltern subjectivities.

Chapter 5 examines *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies*, but the overwhelming thrust is on the former. Said's practice of contrapuntal reading and his analysis of *Mansfield Park* in terms of the double bind of absence-presence are employed to analyze the narrative technique of *The Glass Palace* and the construction of the critique of British imperialism. The brooding presence of colonialism and colonialist structures is then examined in the light of an essentially epic mode of narration. The representation of diaspora and migrancy in the novel is set against Bhabha's conceptual notions of liminality and hybridity. The construction of native colonial identities is explored with the help of Bhabha's formulations on hybridity and mimicry. Bakhtin's concepts of 'monologic' (authorial and authoritative) discourse and 'multi-voiced' (dialogic and polyphonic) discourse are employed for a comparative assessment of the narrative techniques of *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies*, both historical narratives and extremely strong critiques of British imperialism. For the analysis of the narrative strategy of *The Hungry Tide* in chapter 6, inputs from recent developments in ecocriticism and related reading practices are used. Apart from ecocriticism, ideas from postcolonialism, deep ecology, anthropocentric thinking and biocentric thinking about environment, and environmentalism in general are culled together to assess if Ghosh's text can be seen to offer a way out of the theoretical impasse of these fields and disciplines. The narrative strategy employed by Ghosh is examined in the light of the realistic narrative as brought in through the ecocritical intervention; the question of representation in a realistic narrative; the ubiquitously ethnographic content of the novel; and the questions surrounding the livelihood and survival of a marginalized community. Ghosh's narrative is finally analyzed as an instance of 'documentary realism' that establishes an uneasy balance between the apparently antagonistic fields.

Chapter 3

The Narrative of Memory

Apart from winning the Sahitya Akademi Prize in 1989, *The Shadow Lines* (1988) has also received a great deal of literary and critical attention from the West and the Indian subcontinent. It is hugely popular in India and in several Indian universities it forms a part of the curriculum. A partition narrative in some ways, it captures the predicament of large numbers of people in the subcontinent whose memories of their childhood are lost forever because the place of their birth is now a part of a different nation. This novel is Ghosh's contribution to the growing body of literature that critiques the ideology of nationalism and the construction of national identities. Though it is an unabashed critique of nationalism and dominant forms of historiography, *The Shadow Lines* is loved primarily because of the sensitivity and the human touch that it brings to the portrayal of human relationships. It is this aspect of the novel that facilitates a smooth entry into the body of Ghosh's work.

Section I of this chapter considers the role of the bildungsroman in the overall narrative strategy of this novel. It proposes to look at bildungsroman as the frame narrative that allows the deployment of memory as the chief narrative agency for the destabilization of the simple equation between events and their representation. Section II of this chapter focuses on the complex relationship between the narrator and his cousin Ila and argues that the relationship replicates the power structure of a typical colonial binary. It goes on to examine how, by employing memory as a mode of perception and narrative, this binary is turned inside out. Section III concentrates on the relationship between the narrator and his uncle Tridib. This section further examines the ways by which Tridib, his nephew and May Price escape being trapped within powerful colonial narratives. The next section interprets Ghosh's novel as a telling critique of nationalism and all such discourses fashioned out of an ideology of difference. This critique is examined in the light of a deconstructionist reading of the grandmother's rhetoric of nationalism and the forces that threaten and rupture the alleged homogeneity of the nation. Section V, the last section, argues that the strategic deployment of memory as the chief narrative trope, coupled with a narrative strategy

that evokes oral narrations, posits *The Shadow Lines* as a subversive text that critiques dominant and institutionalized modes of knowing, telling, dwelling and remembering.

I

The Shadow Lines follows the tradition of the ‘bildungsroman’: the child narrator coming to maturity in the course of the narrative. The most endearing and enduring image of the novel is that of the child narrator with an old Bartholomew’s Atlas, who undertakes imaginative travels through distant and unknown lands guided by his uncle, Tridib. But it will be wrong to assume that the novel ends with the coming of age of the narrator. The novel is peculiarly not about the growing up of a small boy in a classic Dickensian fashion. Even as the narrative invests significantly in the childhood of the narrator spent in Calcutta, it throws up far more important questions and challenges as regards some of the dominant contemporary issues. To John C. Hawley, for instance, the novel “is not simply a *Bildungsroman*,” but it is “one man’s embodiment of the national trauma that lives on in the lives of today’s South Asians” (Amitav 65-66). *The Shadow Lines* attempts to tease meaning from the dramatic representation of issues such as the making of a nation, its history, inter-religious conflict, and the possibility of human relationships across what is deemed to be an unbridgeable national and cultural divide. The manner in which these issues are raised in the text has been the focus of much critical debate over the years. One may begin by asking the question: what is the role of bildungsroman in the overall narrative strategy of *The Shadow Lines*?

A structuralist response to this question would be that bildungsroman is the overall and the underlying organizing principle of the entire narrative. As has already been discussed in the last chapter, a typical structuralist critique of the novel will be premised on the figure of the child and his development into a mature adult as the master code, the invariant structure across all bildungsroman novels. This master code will then be employed to explain the narrative of *The Shadow Lines* exactly in terms of a typical bildungsroman text such as Dickens’s *Great Expectations*. It is basically the bildungsroman motif that holds together the recurrent temporal and spatial dislocations in the narrative. However, it is difficult to summarily deny the validity of a structuralist interpretation. At the same time, it needs to be recognized that such a

response is fraught with fundamental contradictions that emerge from the apparent lack of a well laid-out and elaborate plot in the novel. *The Shadow Lines* does not boast of a plot typical of a realistic novel. Viney Kirpal argues that plotlessness, as interpreted from a Western point of view, is one of the distinctive features of the third world novel (“What” 75). It can be reasonably argued that Ghosh’s second novel lacks plot as one traditionally understands it with reference to a realistic novel. Like Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, it creates immense capital out of its looping, shuttling and non-linear narrative. It stands out for its digressive and a-chronological narration that destabilizes discrete temporal boundaries. Yet, the novel begins in a classic realistic fashion: “In 1939, thirteen years before I was born, my father’s aunt, Mayadebi, went to England with her husband and her son, Tridib.”²³ Apart from the wealth of precise information contained in this opening sentence, what strikes one is the specificity of reference to place and date. Such specificity, a hallmark of a realistic narrative, also characterizes the narrative of *The Shadow Lines* as it reproduces facts and factual accounts with a neat and clinical precision: “In 1962, the year I turned ten, my grandmother retired, upon reaching the age of sixty” (115). This is how the second part of the novel begins. Apart from the beginnings, there is a near surfeit of proper names in the body of the text. It is at once evident in the reference to addresses and places: the Prices live at 44 Lymington Road; the grandmother’s paternal house in Dhaka is located at 1/31 Jindabahr Lane; Tridib and May meet in Victoria Memorial; “the very best ilish” for “Queen Victoria” is from “the Gariahat fish market” (33); the trees lining the entrance to Tridib’s ancestral house at Raibajar are imported from Brazil and Congo etc. One discerns a similar pattern with objects also. The car in which Tridib, May and the narrator visit Victoria Memorial is a Studebaker; the jacket that Nick wears is an Armani; the song that the narrator hums in London is *beqaraar karke* (94); and the old atlas is Bartholomew’s. When the narrator—recollecting from his memory—tells Ila about Snipe, the narration is marked by a virtual procession of proper names (19). Ghosh’s narrative is also marked by specific references to historical events: Indian wicket-keeper Budhi Kunderan’s century against the visiting English team at Madras in 1964 is one such instance; the theft of the holy hair from Hazratbal mosque in Srinagar in 1963 is another. The later instance is a very significant historical event recorded in the novel, and it engenders, towards the end of the novel, reflections on the importance of peace in the subcontinent.

This surfeit of proper names has not gone unnoticed. Jon Mee, situating the novel against “the magic realist strain in recent Indian writing in English,” observes that “*The Shadow Lines* might seem to be an object lesson in realism. Cold, hard facts—the very stuff of realism—are constantly being invoked” (“Burthen” 91-92). Meenakshi Mukherjee posits the point that this documentary accuracy “might even lead one to believe that the primary agenda of the novelist is verisimilitude, his basic mode of representation realism” (“Maps” 259). However, both agree that the novel is actually far from being a realistic work. As a point of departure, Mukherjee points out that “amidst this welter of minutiae,” the narrator’s name has been deliberately omitted (260). A more significant point of departure, for Mukherjee, is the destabilization of “the simple equation between events and their written report” that otherwise assures “the credibility of the representation” in a realistic narrative. This actually “invalidates realism as a narrative mode in *The Shadow Lines*” (259). Vinita Chandra, in her critique of the novel, also adopts a similar line of argument:

Ghosh uses a narrative technique that does not adhere strictly to social realism. The narrative emerges through the uncertain, often contradictory memories of different characters and cuts across different times and spaces in an attempt to subvert the linear plot structure characteristic of realism. (68)

It may be fruitful to take Mukherjee’s formulation of the problem as destabilization of the simple equation between events and their written report and Chandra’s tentative hypothesis of memory being the structuring device of the novel as significant premises with which to begin the analysis of the narrative strategy of the novel. Before we do so, however, the question of the role of bildungsroman in Ghosh’s narrative needs to be addressed. The structuralist argument that bildungsroman is the overall and the underlying organizing principle seems untenable now. Instead, the bildungsroman motif may be seen as a framing narrative, as an alibi that allows the narrator and the text to engage in a particular reconstruction of the past. This chapter will consider memory as the chief agent of the narrative as well as the narration of *The Shadow Lines*. In other words, it will look at memory as informing the ‘content’ and structuring the ‘form’ of the novel.

II

Easily one of the most influential texts of the entire twentieth century, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* begins in the following manner: "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice" (1). The sentence quoted above is pivoted on the word 'remember'. It is fairly well documented that the fictional world of Macondo in the novel was highly inspired by the memories of Marquez's early childhood spent in the village of Aracataca in northern Columbia. A critic comments that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* "actually arises from memories and is structured around them" (Palencia-Roth 354). *The Shadow Lines* can be examined from a similar perspective. As Suvir Kaul says, "(t)he pressure of this question—do you remember?—generates the form of the novel" ("Separation" 269). It may be pointed out that in the opening page of *The Shadow Lines* the word 'remember' occurs five times (3). It gradually gathers force and precipitates a momentary crisis when the narrator expresses shock and incredulity—"how could you forget it?"—at his cousin Ila's "faint recollection" of a specific event (19). Ila replies with an equal dose of incredulity at the narrator's memory—how do *you* remember?" (20, italics in original). This anticipates a major crisis in the later part of the narrative when the narrator is confronted with not just an individual's act of forgetting, but a collective act of not remembering (220-24). This later moment is very crucial to the narrative as most of the responses to the critical questions that the novel raises hinge on the outcome of how the narrator confronts such acts of public forgetting. However, the focus at present will be on an individual's act of remembering and another individual's act of forgetting.

Ila's forgetting and the narrator's remembering are key determinants in the complex "chequerboard of relationships" that exists between the two (81). Both are cousins—blood relatives—and are of approximately the same age. They have also been said to look so alike as children that the narrator "could have been her twin" (31). But, just as the documentary accuracy is a facade that contains the actual narrative technique of this novel, so too do the apparent similarities between Ila and the narrator paper over the differences that characterize their personalities. The

similarities, heavily outnumbered and trivial in significance when placed contrapuntally with the differences, are used as ruse by the narrative to hammer home the differences. Actually, the novel builds up on the differences in their personalities and projects Ila as the obverse of the narrator and also as his double. One can begin charting the differences with the most obvious—sex. While the narrator is a male, Ila is a female.²⁴ Both belong to the same class but to two different rungs of the same class. While the narrator as a child “had never been more than a few hundred miles from Calcutta” (20), Ila has been a globetrotter. Ila lives in the present and for her “the current was the real” (30) while her cousin tries to relive the past. The visualization of time—both the past as well as the present—is a crucial determinant of their relationship. This relationship is also tempered with the narrator’s realization of “the inequality of our needs” (44). As a child, the narrator’s unreciprocated feelings toward his cousin are exposed and betrayed to the whole family, Ila included, by his mother (43-44). Ghosh has very poignantly and evocatively handled this delicate moment. The narrator’s mother not only makes public, within the text, the inequality of their needs, but also in the same process, betrays a truth to the reader that governs the perception of the narrator’s relationship with Ila. As the narrator later recollects, his mother “had given Ila the knowledge of her power, . . . that need is not transitive, that one may need without oneself being needed” (44). This matrix of relationships is intimately mediated by a power structure, quite akin to the residual power structures of colonialism. Seen as a binary, the power structure of this relationship is heavily biased in favour of Ila who is the privileged one among the two.

Ghosh, however, proceeds by inverting the binary from within. Ila’s inability to comprehend the past is symptomatic of a certain ‘lack’ that plays itself out across many contexts. This lack consists of a contradiction or a paradox: her incomprehension/rejection of the past has been set off against her apparent comprehension/acceptance of the present (current) that is real to her. However, her initiation into the present remains “grievously incomplete” as she is made to compromise on many fronts.²⁵ While as a child she seeks a false refuge from the reality of racist bullying in the made up story of Magda, as an adult she struggles to put up with the reality of Nick’s adultery and fecklessness by trying to convince herself that she “made it all up” (248). The hypocrisy which she claims to detest in

Robi during the episode in a bar in Calcutta and the squalor that she believes to be the feature of “genteel little lives” (188) come back to haunt her with a chilling reminder that she is not free even in London. In a curious act of doubling, even the past that she disowns comes back to reclaim her by denying her the satisfaction of belonging to the present. The narrator is quick to point this out with a sense of grudging satisfaction: “Your sins have finally come home to roost” (188). Actually, Ila is a victim of deceptions, more so of “self-deceptions.”²⁶ In the binary of her relationship with her cousin, she is aware of her powerful and privileged status which essentially flows from her travels across the world, her stay in London, and her relationship with Nick. Her relationship with Nick is underpinned by an acute self-consciousness of the baggage of colonial history: the knowledge/fact that her race was once colonized by the British. Her refusal to confront this historical reality leads her instead to cocoon herself in the delusion that she properly belongs to the West, or to the erstwhile colonizers. Her unwillingness and failure to confront reality by deceiving herself may be read as an individual’s attempt at exorcising the ghosts of a collective past through a self-willed escapism.

Alternately, however, this may even be interpreted broadly as an instance of the continuation of a psychological syndrome displayed by the typical middle-class Bengali ‘bhadralok’ during the Raj. In his correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ghosh takes up the issue of ‘race’ and suggests that the identity of an average middle-class Bengali bhadralok during the Raj consisted of a double bind: neglecting the question of race and privileging his apparent modernity available through education and the modern/colonial institutions. Ghosh’s reading suggests that all the versions of modernity that the Bengali middle-class had built would collapse if they accepted the fact of racial prejudice (Ghosh and Chakrabarty 153). Hence, the denial of the fact of racial prejudice. In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh offers a brilliant take on this aspect of colonial identity through the characters of Beni Prasad Dey, one of the earliest native District Collectors, and Arjun, one of the earliest native officers in the British Indian Army. Ila’s situation is symptomatic of this syndrome. In the case of Ila and the two characters from *The Glass Palace* mentioned above, the silenced native subjectivities threaten to come to the fore prompting a crisis of sorts. It implies that the burden of the colonial encounter between India and England mediates Ila’s relationships with

England and its subjects. Vinita Chandra rightly points out that Ila bears “the burden of representing a post-colonial female perspective” (75). Since this runs the risk of completely disregarding other subcontinental female perspectives, notably the historical situation that the grandmother brings into the text, Suvir Kaul, it seems, offers a better explanation:

. . . *The Shadow Lines* represents Ila as bearing most heavily the burden of other people’s expectations, and her unhappiness as the product of deep cultural contradictions. (274)

Ila’s situation brings back to one’s mind the psychological reading of Rudyard Kipling offered by Ashis Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy*. Nandy looks at Kipling as essentially an example of a cultural pathology produced by colonialism marked by “a refusal to look within, an aggressive ‘anti-intracception’ which forced him to avoid all deep conflicts” (69). Kipling’s dilemma, in Nandy’s words, is that “he could not be both Western *and* Indian; he could be either Western *or* Indian” (71, italics in original). This is read as Kipling’s and the colonial culture’s failure to come to terms with cultural difference. As a typical case of cultural pathology produced by the culture of colonialism, Ila is unable to manage the deep cultural contradictions. The point to be noted is that her obverse and the non-privileged cousin negotiates the contradictions better. This illustrates the lack that characterizes Ila and her perception.

It should be rewarding now to look at how the narrative reveals this lack, or the narrative strategy employed to unmask this lack. The narrative is pivoted on the seminal role that memory or its absence/denial plays in shaping this lack. Ila lives 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” (30). Her acts of forgetting stand out in contrast to the narrator’s acts of remembering. On the issue of forgetting or not remembering, she can even be contrasted with most other characters: while the grandmother has vivid memories of her childhood in Dhaka, Robi and May have memories of the riot in Dhaka that ended Tridib’s life. More significantly, the narrative unfolds itself through these memories. For Ila, however, it is otherwise. The only memory that she seems to have been blessed with is the location of the ‘Ladies’ in the airport departure lounges. Moreover, the narrative seldom unravels through her consciousness. While the episode of Houses played under the large table at Raibajar is

routed through the narrator's memory, Ila's mother narrates the episode of the thalagoya in Colombo. Even the episode at the pub in Calcutta, so crucial for the articulation of her notion of freedom and identity, does not emanate from her memory and consciousness. Hence, the denial of memory to Ila keeps her strategically out of those sites from where the rambling, shuttling and non-linear narrative of the novel issues forth. In other words, narrative agency is withheld from her character by denying her the power of memory. Let us now take up for discussion the second term of the binary—time and space—on which this lack plays itself out.

In a typical realistic narrative, space is a 'given'. This is true not only of the nineteenth-century English masterpieces, but also of the work of Indian novelists like R. K. Narayan. One can of course argue that Narayan's Malgudi is not a given in that it is not real, but fictional. It can not be located on the map as, say, George Eliot's Midlands. However, because Narayan's Malgudi retains the broad representational character like Hardy's Wessex, space in Narayan is a given. A structuralist critique of these works will basically look at the representation of space. Ghosh's novel, however, calls for an alternative interpretation because space is not simply represented, it is invented. One of the most seminal aspects of *The Shadow Lines* is its heavy investment in the idea of space. Just as the construction of time depends on how it impinges on the consciousness of particular characters, understanding space is also crucial to one's imagination. The novel is ideologically allied to the view "that a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one's imagination" (21). It is precisely this characteristic of spatial inventiveness of the imagination that allows the narrator to find his way through the streets of London and through the insides of the house of Mrs. Price. These spaces are already familiar to him although he visits them for the first time. He has invented these places in his imagination and has visited and revisited them a number of times. In a way, these spaces are always already available to him through Tridib. To the narrator, the names of places he sees as a child on the old Bartholomew's Atlas are "a set of magical talismans" whereas, to Ila, the same places are "a worldwide string of departure lounges" (20). The significant point here is that the departure lounges are not the same but distinctly individual, the location of the 'Ladies' serving as the marker of differentiability. This seems to suggest that Ila's personality is not characterized by an *absolute* lack to perceive difference. In her own

way, she differentiates between the country of her origin and her adopted home, and also between her life and genteel little lives. Her idiom, in a way, has been fashioned by the ideology of difference that sets the 'self' against the 'other' and 'us' against 'them'.²⁷ When she is forbidden by Robi to dance in a pub in Calcutta because "(g)irls don't behave like that here," she bursts forth yelling: "Do you see now why I've chosen to live in London? It's only because I want to be free. . . . Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you" (88-89). What we see here is an apparent contradiction in terms: on the one hand Ila perceives difference, and on the other hand, she homogenizes experience, as all the places pointed out on the map seem same to her. One can say that while she perceives difference, she is unable to perceive the context. As the narrator understands, to Ila "morality could only be an absolute ... context had no place in her judgements" (82). Contrasted with May's reaction at the station in Calcutta to a "battery of whistles" and a "chorus of voices" after she kisses Tridib—"Oh, I'm sorry ... It's obviously not the right thing to do here"—Ila's inability to perceive the context becomes an important component of the lack that marks her perception (164-65). And, this is very crucial because context seamlessly flows into space (and also time) throughout the text. Therefore, the paradox or the contradiction: "(T)he inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places, she had never travelled at all" (21).

This difference between the narrator and his cousin is graphically recorded at two places in the novel. The first instance (in real time, though it occurs later in the narrative) is after Ila's mother—Queen Victoria—has finished narrating the episode of the thala-goya in their Colombo house. On their way downstairs, Tridib points out to the narrator an architectural detail: "Did you notice that Ila's house had a sloping roof?" (29). Sloping roofs mean that there will be no place to fly kites and do many things that one is used to doing on the flat roofs in Calcutta. The narrator is not initially alert to this architectural-spatial and, by extension, cultural difference. When it is pointed out to him, however, he is perfectly able to perceive and imagine the difference. When the narrator plays the game of Houses with Ila under the large table at Raibajar, he displays a similar alertness to architectural-spatial details regarding the need for a veranda. Ila, however, fails to reciprocate as imaginatively as the narrator since she is unable to perceive the necessity of a veranda (70-71). The narrator, still

smarting from his mother's act of making public the inequality of their needs, feels "a sudden, predatory thrill of triumph" at Ila's uncertainty and confusion (70). On this episode, Mukherjee offers a very convincing argument that is centred upon the understanding and identification of culturally-specific 'female spaces like terraces verandas and courtyards. Setting off "Ila's inability to comprehend their importance" against the narrator's alertness to these spaces, Mukherjee reads the whole episode as "the essential difference between the cousins" ("Maps" 262).

In a recent article on cosmopolitanism in *The Shadow Lines*, Shameem Black focuses on the construction of cosmopolitanism vis-à-vis home, and identifies Tridib as "an ideal cosmopolitan precisely because of his immersion within discourses of home" (57). The espousal of cosmopolitanism that is not articulated at the expense of the home, domesticity and rootedness is read by Black as Ghosh's idea of "a contemporary cosmopolitanism that critiques masculinist and imperialist visions of world citizenship" (46). For Black, the essential difference between Ila and characters such as Tridib and May is that Ila is unable to perceive and contemplate the world through the home and vice versa. Though "Ila lives the most experientially transnational life" in the novel, "she remains trapped within an imaginative paralysis that prevents her from embracing the new communities she inhabits" (58). In a sense, Ila's "antiseptic rootlessness" and de-contextualized subjectivity clash with the cosmopolitan ideals the novel valorizes (58-59). Black's interpretation of Ila within the matrix of domesticity-cosmopolitanism can also be read as a significant aspect of the lack that characterizes Ila. There is a great temptation at this point to read this lack in terms of the problems of "transition narratives" as proposed by Dipesh Chakrabarty. Chakrabarty's argument, which takes off from the opening sentences of Sumit Sarkar's *Modern India*, tries to locate the sites where the transition narratives remained grievously incomplete ("Postcoloniality" 226). Through the public and the private sides of the modern citizen as expressed in the genre of the autobiography, Chakrabarty points to the "'incompleteness' of bourgeoisie transformation in India" (232).²⁸ As a case of cultural pathology produced by colonialism and informed by the residual power structures of imperialism, Ila's situation seamlessly fits into the problems of transition narratives. Again, then, Ila is made to bear the burden of the colonial encounter. At any rate, the binary, of which Ila is apparently the privileged,

has been subverted from within, or to use an expression from the text, it has turned itself “inside out” (203). Ghosh achieves this by employing a narrative strategy that withdraws from Ila the powers of memory, imagination and narration.

III

The narrator’s relationship with Ila is underpinned by currents of half-acknowledged feelings of hostility and sexual necessity that have the potential to precipitate a major psychological crisis. The narrator nurtures, deep down, a secret sexual desire for her, but she always baffles him with “the mystery of difference” (31). These intense and ambivalent feelings for Ila are offset by his deeply supportive and educative relationship with Tridib, his father’s cousin. This relationship defines the ideological and the imaginative world of the novel, and the narrator also functions as a ruse in order to enable the reader to access this world. In A. N. Kaul’s words, Tridib is “the novel’s *ur*-hero, *ur*-narrator, *ur*-imagination” (307). In fact, the narrative of *The Shadow Lines* is ‘focalized’ through Tridib. As a key narratological concept introduced by Genette in his *Narrative Discourse*, focalization suggests a subtle distinction between ‘who sees?’ and ‘who tells?’ (see section I of chapter 2). Though Ghosh’s novel is narrated (told) through an unnamed narrator, the whole narrative is routed (seen) through Tridib. Tridib belongs to an important and typical set of characters in the oeuvre of Ghosh: as a researcher/archaeologist he precedes Ghosh himself in *In An Antique Land*, Murugan in *The Calcutta Chromosome* and Piyali Roy in *The Hungry Tide*. Further to this, characters like Tridib have a strategic role to play in the fiction of Ghosh as history and anthropological research occupy substantial space in the work of Ghosh. In Ghosh’s opinion, the historical perspective is generally “the unseen dimension” (Kumar 104-105). These characters, thus, play a key role in the history-fiction interface in Ghosh’s work.

The second son of a second-generation Datta-Chaudhuri, Tridib had every means at his disposal to enter a decent profession through his family connections.²⁹ However, he is the only person of his family who chooses to stay back at Calcutta, working on a Ph.D. in Archaeology. He loves street corner addas at Gole Park, spends time alone as a recluse in his room at Ballygunge Place, and has a girlfriend from across the seas. Though rooted in Calcutta, Tridib is a fairly well-travelled man; his

journey as a child of eight to London in 1939 is a significant constitutive element of his personality. Tridib's journeys are both spatial as well as imaginative. Erudite and empathetic, he is a good judge of character and situation, and this helps him to mingle with the heterogeneous crowd at the addas. The narrator's grandmother dismisses him "as an essentially lightweight and frivolous character" (6) because, in her opinion, he "wastes his time" (4). For her, "wasted time . . . begins to stink" (4). The narrator loves him because though Tridib did not use time as he and others like him were taught to use it, "his time didn't stink" (4). The reason for the grandmother's dislike of Tridib, according to the narrator, is that "she feared him" (7). This element of fear may have been bred by incomprehension. The grandmother's middle-class world just could not conceive of an existence like Tridib's, and this is reciprocated in large measure by Ila's disbelief at the existence of "people like Tridib, who could experience the world as concretely in their imaginations as she did through her senses" (30). Incomprehensibility, then, is a crucial determinant of people's responses to Tridib's personality as "(n)obody was ever quite sure where they stood with Tridib" (10). The exceptions to this general norm are, of course, the narrator and May Price.

The relationship that exists between the narrator and Tridib is deeply significant to the understanding of the novel and what it stands for. Tridib is his father's cousin and, hence, they are related by blood. Tutelage is an obvious and defining aspect of this relationship because, despite having a grandmother who is the headmistress of a school, Tridib acts as the de facto tutor to his child nephew.³⁰ Tridib tutors the young narrator to use his "imagination with precision" (24); provides him with "worlds to travel in" (20); tells him "that a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one's imagination" (21); and teaches him

that one could never know anything except through desire, real desire, . . . 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. (29)

The narrator takes these lessons very seriously. During his visit to Victor Gollancz's publishing house in London, he realizes that "having seen it first through Tridib's eyes, its past seemed concurrent with its present" (31). In other words, the past and

the present become mirror images of each other: acceptance of the one implies the presence of the other; denial implies the consequent absence of the other. This can be contrasted with Ila's disowning of the past, an act that recoils to deny her the satisfaction of belonging to the present. Similarly, her rejection of India and Indians boomerangs, in a strange sort of way, as her initiation and adoption in her adopted land remains grievously incomplete. This is a part of a larger motif of reclamation of the human subject where rejected space and/or time comes back to haunt the subject. This motif is at work in case of the grandmother also: her detestation of wasted time that begins to stink comes back to haunt her in her post-retirement days (114). Moreover, her brand of bloody nationalism comes back to haunt her throughout the remainder of her life after Tridib is killed in an act of mob fury in the country of her origin. The pattern is repeated, curiously, in case of her uncle at Dhaka also:

There was a time when that old man was so orthodox that he wouldn't let a Muslim's shadow pass within ten feet of his food? And look at him now, paying the price of his sins. (210)

What inferences can one draw from this pattern of reclamation?

Ghosh's narrative strategy is to provide a mirror image for each significant event; the two opposite images then at some temporal point in the narration flow seamlessly into each other.³¹ Alan Tresawsen discovers this in the exhilaration of wartime Europe:

People don't believe me, he said, but it's the same over there—in Germany—though of course in a much more grotesque way. It was odd coming back here—like stepping through a looking-glass. (66)

The narrator tries to persuade his cousin "that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine" (21). The riots in Calcutta mirror those in Dhaka. After riots break out on both sides of the border, the two governments "traded a series of curiously symmetrical accusations" (230); "'responsible opinion' in both India and East Pakistan reacted with an identical sense of horror and outrage" (229); and "there were innumerable cases of Muslims in East Pakistan giving shelter to Hindus, . . . and equally, in India, of Hindus sheltering Muslims" (229-30). The partitioned portions of the grandmother's ancestral house at Dhaka are mirror images of each other, and they anticipate the would-be relationship between India and East Pakistan. The large table

at Raibajar under which the narrator and Ila play Houses as eight year olds doubles up as the cellar of Mrs. Price's house at London when they are adults. The grandmother's ideas of nationalism and nation apply, without any alteration, to India as well as England. Robi discovers, as part of his duty as an administrator, that "an anonymous note" reads like his "own speech transcribed on a mirror" (246-47). The narrator can step through the "looking-glass" and discover a "kindred spirit" (52) in his double—Nick—although the latter is "a spectral presence beside me in my looking glass" (50).

While the mirror image seems ubiquitous, Ghosh has introduced a very subtle and nuanced distinction between those who are able to transcend difference and those whose sensibilities are impervious to it. Alan Tresawsen, Tridib, the narrator and May belong to the first group as they are conscious that a context or a situation may have its mirror image; Ila, the grandmother and Nick Price belong to the second group as they can not identify a situation and its likeness in the mirror. The common thread that runs through the first list above is that the characters have been shown to possess the capacity to negotiate the boundaries of time, space and culture through the imagined gesture of stepping through a looking-glass. While the narrator discovers a kindred spirit in Nick Price, the latter does not reciprocate in kind. The analysis so far leads to the conclusion that a character's ability to perceive, understand and negotiate difference is contingent upon the functioning of his/her memory and imagination. The present discussion on the mirror image can be taken to its logical conclusion by focusing on the relationship between Tridib and his protégé. This relationship offers the best and, possibly the ultimate, example of the working of this image.

Tridib and his protégé, the narrator, have identity of reference, experience and imagination. The narrator would like to think that the eight year old Tridib "had looked like" him (3). (The grandmother is quick to contradict this, however.) The sights that Tridib experiences first-hand in London, starting with Victor Gollanz's publishing house to the Prices' residence at 44 Lymington Road, are relived by his nephew fifteen years after his death. Tridib's tattered old Bartholomew's Atlas helps his protégé rediscover the meaning of space and distance in his hostel room in Delhi. The identities go further as Tridib's protégé also works on a Ph.D. which, incidentally, is also about the retrieval of the past. Since the narrative does not clearly

mention Tridib's completion of his Ph.D., the narrator's research may well be interpreted as an act of extension and, perhaps, completion of the research study. In case of May Price, Tridib's girlfriend, we can definitely say that the narrator's relationship with her is indeed an act of extension as well as completion. Tridib, through a pornographic letter, had expressed the desire to meet May "as a stranger, in a ruin," "in a place without a past, without history" "with the utter freedom of strangers" (144). Tridib and May do, after all, meet in a ruin—the Victoria Memorial—but the narrator posthumously, as it were, consummates their relationship several years later. Jon Mee understands it to be "a metonym for the possibility of making human connections across the cultural differences with which Ghosh so scrupulously structures the rest of his novel" ("Burthen" 90). He reads it essentially as the extension of Tridib's desire to go beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places. The narrator completes the destined role of Tridib as Tristan by an act of physical consummation with a woman-across-the-sea. The identification of Tridib with his mirror image is complete and the last bastion of borders is blurred into shadow lines. A. N. Kaul offers a very perceptive reading of this episode. He structures his reading around the concepts of an "amorphous romantic subjectivity" and transcendence and argues that Ghosh's novel "is a metaphor for evading rather than exploring political realities" (303). Before Kaul's critique is taken up for discussion, it would be better to wrap up the present argument concerning the relationship between Tridib and the narrator with which this section began.

This relationship has a fundamentally triadic structure: 'Imagination', 'Memory' and 'Stories' are the three points. The three are very closely linked and they subvert the motif of reclamation from within. In the case of Tridib and the narrator, the past does not reclaim the human subject because both live the past in their present. For both, the contemporaneity of the past translates into acts of reclaiming the past from oblivion. The past is preserved in the memories of these characters and in times of crisis acts of reclamation essentially become affirmations of self-identity. This is especially true when the narrator is confronted with an act of public forgetting during a conversation with his friends in Delhi. Apprehensive and nervous that his private memory may be completely worked over and rubbed off by the collective memory of his friends, the narrator tries to desperately salvage his past

from the detritus of public memory. Determined not to let his “past vanish without trace” (221), he discovers that it survives only as a trace, much in the same way as Bomma of *In an Antique Land* survives in the footnotes of history. Stories constitute another form of being and Tridib tutors the narrator in the apprenticeship of living in stories. All existence is visualized for the narrator in terms of stories: “Everyone lives in a story, . . . because stories are all there to live in, it was just a question of which one you chose . . .” (182). Stories and memory are contrapuntally placed and they are navigated by means of imagination: the more precise the imagination, the more concrete will be the experience of the world. This relationship, mounted on a triadic structure, is used by Ghosh to subvert and critique some dominant and institutionalized forms of knowing and perceiving the world which the following section addresses.

IV

Travel has been one of the most significant historical aspects of the rise of the West. Whether it is the ‘discovery’ of new lands or the colonization of territories, travel has been possibly the single most crucial determinant of Western contact with Eastern cultures. The trope of travel presupposes an ‘origin’ and a ‘destination’. Colonial accounts of travel between India and England, preserved in documents and narratives, typically represent England as the origin and India as the destination. The prerogative of travel rests with the colonizers, or subjects from the colonial country. Nineteenth-century texts are full of travel accounts. Whether it is Sir Bertram in *Mansfield Park* or Joseph Sedley in *Vanity Fair*, the direction of travel is decisively in favour of the metropolis. Even Forster’s *A Passage to India*, a classic text on the cultural encounter between India and England, is structured around the journey to India of two English subjects, Mrs. Moore and Miss Adela Quested. *The Shadow Lines*, which charts the relationship between an English family and an extended Indian family spread across four generations, begins with an act of movement: travel to the ‘old blighty’ by a family of Indians. This is an extremely significant act since this portrays the natives as travelers and, that too, at a time when England was caught up in the confusion of the Second World War. The terms of travel have been subversively reversed. The binary is inverted from within. Perhaps, a better way of

stating this would be that balance within the binary is restored. Since the novel attaches singular importance to characters and gestures that manage cultural differences and contradictions, it will be sheer injustice to interpret the novel as foisting a new hierarchical binary. Over-priced or otherwise, the novel definitely does not intend to represent the Prices as the under/unprivileged other.³² On the other hand, a refusal to acknowledge that the reversing of terms constitutes a critique would be a gross understatement. Perhaps, a still better way would be to abandon the binary idiom itself.

Leela Gandhi, in her recent book *Affective Communities*, refers to postcolonial scholars' "obligations of a 'contrapuntal perspective'" that breaks down "the stern binary of colonial encounter by refusing the myths of cultural purity, origin, inauguration, and initiation both to the imperial West and to its opposite, anticolonial nationalism or nativism" (4). In *The Intimate Enemy* Ashis Nandy examines the friendship between Mahatma Gandhi (a subject from a colonized country) and C. F. Andrews (a subject from the colonial country) as offering an alternative space where friendship is not mediated by the power structures of imperialism. In *A Passage to India* Forster explores the possibility of friendship between a native and a subject from the colonial country. This attempt in fiction fails to establish friendship between the two because the friendship depicted is contingent upon the power relations in place during the Raj. In *The Shadow Lines* Ghosh attempts to explore the possibility of friendship unmediated by the colonial (and post-colonial) power structures: some relationships such as those between Tridib and May, or between the narrator and May flourish and fructify. Some others, such as the relationship between the narrator and Ila, and Ila and Nick Price are fraught. The first set of relationships is not informed by any residual power structures, colonial or otherwise, and these succeed. Along with the friendship between the Prices and the Datta-Chaudhuris, these relationships can be seen as occupying a space that is excluded from the imperial binary reason. By focusing consistently on the possibilities of non-hierarchical relationships even within the colonial paradigm, *The Shadow Lines* builds up a critique of the colonial as well as the nationalist ideology that reasons only in terms of a hierarchical binary. The unlikely friendship between various generations of the two families is not an isolated instance: it is part of a larger design that marks this novel as a subversive text.

The Shadow Lines is, among other things, a telling critique of nationalism and its attendant institutions. This critique is intricately threaded through a parallel critique of imperialism showing how intimately bound up and similar the two are. Ghosh develops the critique of nationalism in the context of the partitioned Indian subcontinent. This region, along with its contested colonial history and borders drawn in blood, is essentially a colonial and imperial legacy. Hence, the questions posed to nationalism, in turn, pose themselves in relation to imperialism. The nationalism that *The Shadow Lines* critiques is the classic European variety with clearly demarcated geographical and cartographic boundaries. Even as Benedict Anderson convincingly locates the birth of the nation in print-capitalism, suggesting that the nation arose in the time-scale of modernity, he draws our attention to the fact that nations celebrate their hoariness instead of their astonishing youth (refer to section V of chapter 2). Memorialization is extremely crucial for imagining a nation because nations loom from an apparently immemorial past. Anderson's idea of the nation as an imagined community is very powerful and its influence on literary, theoretical and cultural studies have been recorded in chapter 2. Anderson's idea is crucial for an informed appreciation of Ghosh's novel. *The Shadow Lines* ideologically aligns itself with this powerful idea in imagining that the national boundaries that seem so real and concrete are actually shadow lines. More than that, the novel seems to align itself perfectly with Ernest Gellner's formulation: "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it *invents* nations where they do not exist" (qtd. in Anderson 6, italics in original). In a sense, it is nationalism that engenders the nation rather than the other way round. This sort of a critique and understanding of the category of the nation is mounted as a challenge to the dominant narratives of nationalism that try to replicate the cartographic dividing lines as all too real on to the lived spaces of people.

How does Ghosh articulate and develop his critique of nationalism? He does it through the persona of the grandmother and by questioning the linearity that attends the nation in a realistic narrative. Born into a middle-class joint Bengali family in pre-partition Dhaka, the grandmother is the "exemplar of militant nationalism" (S. Kaul 278). A witness to the division of their ancestral Dhaka house to the minutest detail, she is also part of the partition of the country that is accompanied by large-scale bloodshed. While in college in the early twenties, she experiences at first-hand the

arrest of a member of a secret militant society. Fascinated by the tales of the militants, she secretly cherishes the dream of working for them, and even firing at an English magistrate. Her militant nationalism is a product of her childhood memories. She fiercely opposes Ila's stay in England because, in her opinion, Ila "does not belong there" (77). Because she is a part of that historic moment that witnessed the bloody founding of her own nation, she visualizes the European nations as growing out of sacrifices of "their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood" (78). This masculinist bias is evident in her admiration of Robi, especially his muscular forearm (35). The death of Tridib can not diminish her nationalist ardour. Instead, it only strengthens her belief as she donates her jewellery "(f)or your sake; for your freedom" (237).

Ila considers the grandmother as a war-mongering fascist while Tridib considers her "only as a modern middle-class woman" who believes "in the unity of nationhood and territory, of self-respect and national power" (78). Interestingly, history has denied her these comforts. The grandmother is a fiercely proud and independent woman and after the death of her husband she does not accept help from any of her relatives, even her own sister. Consequently, she is shown not to place much value on family relations. In this, she is contrasted with the narrator's mother and most other characters. While family and the family relations were for most "the foundations of moral order," the grandmother "had always founded her morality, schoolmistresslike, in larger and more abstract entities" (129). What are those 'abstract entities' that provide the grandmother with foundations for a moral order? Contemporary critical theories have engaged with the essentially 'constructed' nature of institutions and disciplines that were traditionally seen as being 'natural'. Ever since Anderson's notion of imagined communities, the nation has been viewed as an abstract entity. (For more on this aspect of the nation, refer to section V of chapter 2) The nation is the most visible abstract entity in the space of this novel. For the grandmother, however, it is not at all abstract. It has the force of immediate reality as she discovers in the tragic death of Tridib at the hands of a mob in Dhaka. The grandmother's world-view is fraught with deep contradictions and Ghosh focuses upon them to question the dominant narratives of nationalism that are articulated through her.

The grandmother has been cast in the mould of what is generally known as a strong character. Fiercely proud and independent, she is a strict disciplinarian at home as well as in school and tries to inculcate the same in her grandson. Throughout the narrative, she is shown occupied in meaningful work. She hates the thought of wasting time and is convinced that her principles are founded on unshakable grounds. This ground is certainly the nation, one of those abstract entities on which she has founded her morality. Her strict regimen, austerity and work ethic are connected with the progress narrative of the nation. Individuals as citizens, in her view, contribute to nation building. Therefore, her liking for Robi (who utilizes time to become an IAS officer and serve the nation) and her dislike of Tridib. Her vision of nation-building is predicated upon the geo-political reality of nations, one that conflates geographical space with a particular nation. Borders, in this reality, are concrete and almost inviolable. The grandmother holds on to this 'precept' with such religiosity that she even expects to see the border between India and East Pakistan from her plane. When confronted by her son that the actual border is very unlike the dividing lines on maps, she could read the disarrangement of her universe. The sanctified lines that had the force of reality suddenly begin to develop some kind of a slippery formlessness. Markers and measure of difference, their validity is unknowingly challenged by the narrator's father as he explains to his mother that the border in the modern world "isn't on the frontier: it's right inside the airport" (151). The gradual erosion of her unshakable foundation culminates in a sort of denouement:

But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? . . . What was it all for then—partition and all the killing and everything—if there isn't something in between? (151)

This is a telling indictment of the ideology of difference that floats the idea that a different reality exists on the other side of the border. The heavy investment in the construction of difference underlines the discourses of the nation. Implicit in this is the notion of the 'other' against which national identities are constructed. It is the binary of 'us' and 'them' or the 'self' and the 'other' that has helped nationalist discourses consolidate difference and consolidate borders. Sharmani Gabriel has read Bakhtin's concept of 'heteroglossia' in *The Shadow Lines* to build a thesis that identifies the novel as a critique of the homogenous nationalist discourses founded on

the notion of difference. In the novel, the grandmother is not the only character who professes this ideology. The adult narrator discovers that as a child he grew up believing “in the reality of nations and borders” and the existence of “another reality” across the border (219). Even Ila’s belief that freedom can be got in London stems from a similar conviction in the reality of nations and borders. But, the ideology that “distance separates, that it is a corporeal substance” has completely taken hold of the grandmother’s world-view (219).

As characters informed by the ideology of difference, the grandmother and Ila are very similar. While the former situates difference within the postcolonial dynamics of the partitioned halves of the subcontinent, the latter does it in the context of the colony and the metropolis. For Ila, the differentiability between India and East Pakistan/Bangladesh is not an issue at all. She can, without displaying any signs of self-consciousness, straightway walk into “her favourite ‘Indian’ restaurant—a small Bangladeshi place called the Maharaja” (240). To her discomfort and horror, she discovers that what is true for her is not true for Robi. This is another instance that betrays to the reader Ila’s inability to perceive the context. On this point, however, the grandmother is different from her. The grandmother’s contextualized subjectivity is as much a result of colonial history as it is an affirmation of her memory. Set against Ila’s forgetting, her memory of the arrest of a revolutionary and her memories of Jindabahr Lane and her Dhaka house, pre and post-partition, stand out as exemplary. She does not remember on the strength of archives or documents kept on bookshelves. Rather, it is her memory that preserves her past for herself. Hence, like the narrator, her recuperative memory is also a source and an affirmation of self-identity. Yet she chooses to identify herself with abstract entities though there is absolutely no hint that her past is preserved in nationalist and historical discourses. By declining to accept the power of her own memories and by refusing to imagine a story for herself, she becomes a character who carries the burden of received narratives.³³ This is how the discourse of nationalism, the most visible received narrative, completely controls her perception. However, when she discovers that her own contradictory nationality challenges the foundational ideology of difference, she is unable to manage the rupture of her neat and ordered universe founded on this ideology. Thus, in a classic

poststructuralist fashion, Ghosh employs the grandmother to deconstruct the very narratives that she mouths with conviction.

The grandmother's world-view is completely worked over by the dominant narratives of nationalism. She believes that nations, their borders drawn in blood, have been built upon sacrifices of the men folk. She even believes in the teleology of the nation: "Once that happens, people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood" (78). The originary narratives of the nation flow into this built-in teleology that visualizes the inhabitants of a nation as ultimate citizens. Perfectly in agreement with the progressivist narrative of capitalist modernity, this teleology demands that the regional, cultural and, more significantly, religious differences cease to exist. While the grandmother implicitly believes in this teleology, curiously enough it is she who ultimately deconstructs this teleology in case of the subcontinent. Upon discovering that her 'jethamoshai' is still alive and living in their old house in Dhaka, she arranges to bring him to Calcutta, her invented country. The grandmother's apprehension that the country of her birth may not be safe for her uncle does not stem from a realization that it is now a different country, a different nation. Moreover, her uncle completely rejects the partition and the whole idea of "India-Shindia" (215) and, in a way, falsifies her situation where her nationality has come to be messily at odds with the country of her birth. This apprehension, rather, can be situated within the dynamics of Hindu-Muslim relations, a critical dynamics that forced the partition of the subcontinent into two hostile entities. In the post-partition situation, it continues to mediate the relationship between the citizens of the nations of the subcontinent.

This dynamics of religion exemplifies the continuation of the past in the present. The narrator and his school companions, who were never part of the partition, feel vividly the hostility of this dynamics on their bus ride to school. When one of the occupants of the bus mentions that "they had poured poison into Tala tank," no one felt the need to ask "who 'they' were" (199). The answer is shared in common by all of them. When Montu does not turn up at the Gole Park stop, the narrator and his companions know what to do: "Soon after, one by one, we unscrewed the caps of our bottles and poured the water out" (200). The answers to the questions 'who they

were?’ and ‘what to do?’ are not only shared, but also internalized. However, it shows only one side of the relationship. The antagonistic feelings in the novel are partly offset by the relationship that exists between the old man in Dhaka and Khalil, a refugee. An orthodox Hindu who earlier wouldn’t let a Muslim’s shadow pass within ten feet of his food, the old man is now looked after by a Muslim refugee family. He is even a grandfather to Khalil’s children. The complex matrix of this relationship makes the grandmother apprehensive of the safety of her uncle in Dhaka though that happens to be his country. Although her language is completely usurped by the rhetoric of the originary narratives, by a curious quirk of fate, it is her origin that fades in comparison to the origin of her jethamoshai. Hence, her situation deconstructs the teleology on which she had built her notion of nations and citizens.³⁴ Isn’t this again an instance of transition narrative where the transition has remained grievously incomplete? Does this not portray a peculiar instance of nations without citizens? In the perspective of the subcontinent, this narrative of nationalist teleology may remain perpetually in a state of transition, always incomplete.

Drawing circles on the old Bartholomew’s Atlas in his hostel room as a university student, the narrator makes a similar discovery: “It seemed to me then that within this circle there were only states and citizens; there were no people at all” (233). The circle that the narrator draws on the map has Milan as its centre and it covers most of Europe. The narrator’s reflection quoted above is occasioned when he sets off this geographical and cartographic space against the all too real lived space of the subcontinent. For him, these nation-states are characterized by clearly demarcated borders, the sanctity of which is almost inviolable. The narrator also discovers that the nations within the circle are marked by a near total absence of internal disturbances in the form of riots between communities, an aspect that characterizes the subcontinent. Violence within these European nations, if any, is pushed to the borders and dealt with “science and factories” (233). The narrator can not imagine any event other than war that would bring people of the circle in question out into the streets (232). As rhetoric of war, his perception is consistent with the grandmother’s view—“War is their religion” (78)—as well as with his own earlier view which admitted only a relationship of “war or friendship” between spaces and realities separated by borders (219). While all these similar perceptions seem to form a neat structure within the

text, the easy conflation of Europe with nation-states, with citizens and with war is least convincing. It displays exactly that vein of essentialism the lack of which has been proclaimed to be one of the singular features of Ghosh's fiction. At moments like this, A. N. Kaul's comment—"In some ways, *The Shadow Lines* is an over-ambitious novel" (308)—seems to carry much weight.

The dynamics of Hindu-Muslim interconnections within the text situates violence/disturbance deep inside the nation. Tridib's death is the most exemplary instance of this. It is as if the border has moved from the airport to the heart of the nation. The violence within is set off against "a stupid little skirmish somewhere in the hills," i.e. the 1962 Indo-China war (220). This contrapuntality of the violence within (riot) and violence at the borders (war) foregrounds the Hindu-Muslim dynamics that govern the relationship between people within the nation as against the state in war with another state. The narrative shows a strategic incorporation of this contrapuntality. Violence at the borders, as exemplified by the 1962 Indo-China war, is an event that has been well documented in books and newspapers that are stocked on bookshelves. It is also very well recorded in public memory because "it was the most important thing that happened in the country" when the narrator was a child (220). However, this war has only a peripheral presence as compared to the riots of Calcutta and Dhaka. The narrative technique of memory that this novel employs ensures that riots, an intra-national violent disturbance between communities constituting the nation, are centred in comparison to war—an inter-national violent development governed largely by the dynamics between nations or nation-states. Moreover, it is interesting to note that not only riots, but war also has been brought into the narrative through the memories of the narrator. References to the Second World War surface in the narrative through the memories of the child Tridib as recollected by the narrator. This parallels Robi's recounting of the riots in Dhaka and the narrator's recollection of the Calcutta riots. Thus, the acts of three children remembering through three different *narrative* time frames spread across different time frames of *narration* subvert the linearity that attends the imagining of the nation in realistic narratives. It would be fruitful to come back to Anderson's thesis of the simultaneous rise of the nation and the novel discussed in the chapter 2. Both Anderson and Timothy Brennan look at the novel form as making possible the

imagined community that the nation as a political entity or a collectivity is. The novel is then one of the forms through which this imagined community articulates itself. The narrative strategy that Ghosh employs in his novel problematises the easy correspondence between the two. In a way, by employing memory as the main narrative device, Ghosh's narrative writes into the body of the nation the exclusivity, heterogeneity and contradictions that attend the construction of a nation. It is this very non-linear and shuttling form of Ghosh's novel that challenges the assumed chronology and linearity of modern narratives like the nation.

The challenge is also formulated by focusing on relationships and collectivities that are independent of government and governance. These collectivities are, the narrator reminds us, "the natural enemy of government, for it is in the logic of states that to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relationships between peoples" (230). In other words, the peoples of a nation must be first and foremost citizens, and every act of theirs must be premised on the fact of their being citizens first. In *The Shadow Lines* there are relationships that lie outside the ambit of the state and they rupture the monopoly of the state. It is significant here to note that riots, being intra-national, undermine the assumed homogeneity of the nation whereas wars strengthen the same. Considered as forms of dwelling and organizing, these relationships actually predate the originary narratives of the nation and also outlive the telos into which these narratives are visualized to unproblematically flow. Hindu-Muslim dynamics, the family connections and individual human relationships are three collectivities that fit into the above category. As the preceding section has analyzed Ghosh's working out of the communal dynamics in the subcontinent, family connections and individual relationships are examined in the concluding section of this chapter.

V

The family is an important unit, collectivity and institution in *The Shadow Lines*. Asked about the use of family connections in *The Shadow Lines* in an interview, Ghosh's reply is uncharacteristic: "I do think if you are Indian or Asian, and this is not necessarily to essentialize, that you think in terms of families" (Silva and

Tickell 216-217). Ghosh continues to maintain this line of thought in his correspondence with the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty:

Two of my novels (*The Shadow Lines*, and my most recent, *The Glass Palace*) are centred on families. I know that for myself this is a way of *displacing* the ‘nation’—I am sure that this is the case also with many Indian writers other than myself. In other words, I’d like to suggest that writing about families is one way of *not* writing about the nation (or other restrictively imagined collectivities). (Ghosh and Chakrabarty 147, italics in original)

None can dispute Ghosh’s contention that ‘many Indian writers other than myself’ write about families. This seems to be a favourite ploy with Indian writers writing in English. While Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* is partly about the family, his *The Moor’s Last Sigh* is a saga of families complete with a family tree. A similar family tree also greets the reader when he opens Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel*. Then, there is Rohinton Mistry writing about family matters and Arundhati Roy structuring her prize-winning novel on families. Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* is a magnum opus on inter and intra-familial relations in post-independence India. The focus on the family in Ghosh’s novel is then part of a larger pattern.

The most interesting point about Ghosh’s observation is his thesis that the family for him ‘displaces’ the nation and that writing about families is one way of not writing about the nation. In a way, the more general and more widely accepted view has been “the family as a microscopic representation of the nation” (Kumar 103). Anjali Roy is of the opinion that in *The Shadow Lines* “Ghosh configures the nation in the metaphor of the house” (38). Though Roy makes the comment in the context of the eight-year-old narrator and Ila’s game of Houses, it also holds true for the metaphor of the grandmother’s ancestral house in Dhaka. Home to a large family of two brothers, the ancestral house is divided into two bisecting the house right in the centre. The partition of the house is a harbinger of the larger partition that accompanied independence in 1947. Shameem Black has drawn our attention to how homes, in *The Shadow Lines*, “can mimic the exclusionary tactics of nationalism and communalism” (48). Apart from this being applicable in the case of the partitioned house in Dhaka, it also partly explains the exclusionary tactics practised by the

grandmother in case of Ila. Since the grandmother visualizes home in terms of the nation, she feels the urge to banish deviant behaviour as it has the potential to affect the homogeneity of both the home as well as the nation. Hence, exclusion of not only Ila, but also of Tridib. By all accounts, the home/family in the novel acts as the microscopic representation of the nation. Moreover, though Ghosh champions the shadowy nature of boundaries, he is alert to their realities. To him, nations “matter profoundly and it’s a kind of solipsism to pretend otherwise . . . nation states are very important, and one ignores them at one’s own peril” (Kumar 101-02). In the same interview, Ghosh adds that “even today for many Indians the nation itself is a tenuous idea, it is work in progress, it is a project rather than a reality” (103). And, if it is work in progress and a project rather than a reality, surely then it is a suitable case of a transition narrative that has remained, and may continue to remain, grievously incomplete. How does Ghosh, then, propose to displace the nation by writing about the family? The answer has to be sought in a larger picture, especially in the context of human relationships, family chronicle, personal memoirs, and stories.

In *The Shadow Lines*, there is a recurrent pattern of contrapuntality. Characters, situations and techniques are placed side by side so that one can be highlighted at the expense of the other. We have already discussed the case of Ila and the narrator, the dynamics of violence within and at the borders etc. This contrapuntality also functions in case of details of historical events that are then set off against the narrator’s recollections of them through his memory. Amongst the welter of historical detail contrapuntally placed in the novel, the recollection of 1962 Indo-China war is the occasion for an epiphanic moment which sets the narrator on his “strangest journey: a voyage into a land outside space, an expanse without distances; a land of looking-glass events” (224). The precision and specificity with which historical events are incorporated in the narrative may mark the novel as a variety of the historical novel. However, *The Shadow Lines* positions itself as a challenge to the dominant discourse of history. Historiography, instead of history, might be a more apt term here because Ghosh’s narrative attaches singular importance to the ways by which events of the past are organized and framed as historical discourse. The novel critiques the exclusionary tendencies employed by dominant modes of historiography as they fashion historical discourses from the events of the

past. In an odd sort of way, Ghosh's narrative may even be interpreted as an attempt to rescue history from historiography, particularly those modes that have spawned typical colonialist histories. This is done largely by structuring the narrative of the novel on the lines of a family chronicle. While, on the one hand, Ghosh is alive to the use of history since it "creates specific predicaments, that are particular to that moment in time and nowhere else," on the other, history as public memory does not interest him, but "people's stories" do (Chambers, "Absolute" 30). Ghosh focuses on the Datta-Chaudhuris and their personal and private relationship with an English family. The novel is not about documentary evidence that the official history of a nation-state preserves. It is about those sites within official and dominant histories that are marked by either partial or absolute silence. It is not about public memory recorded in archives but about private memory threatened by intimidating official accounts. By participating in Leftist protest marches in London, Ila finds "a joy merely in knowing that you're a part of history," in the knowledge "that in the future political people everywhere will look to us—in Nigeria, India, Malaysia, wherever" (104). The novel is not about the essentially metropolitan history Ila visualizes; rather, it is more about the personal memoirs and histories of the narrator preserved in his memories.

The narrative technique of the novel plays a major role in positioning the novel as a critique of dominant forms of historiography. The discourse of history presupposes events in time as chronological and linear. Even if the events are a-chronological, historical discourse confers on them not only chronology, but also causality. We have seen in section IV of chapter 2 the contention of narrativists like Hayden White that the practice of historiography involves literary devices like 'motification' and 'emplotment' that bestows on a historical event, the unity and structure of a story. The coherence of a historical discourse does not necessarily suggest the coherence of the historical event it purports to truthfully represent. The homogeneous empty time of the nation is intrinsic to historical discourse as well as to the realistic novel. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson conflates Walter Benjamin's idea of "'homogeneous, empty time'" with the "mediaeval conception of simultaneity-along-time," to persuasively locate "the birth of the imagined community of the nation" along with the flowering of two organs of "print-capitalism"—"the

novel and the newspaper” (24-5). Arguing the simultaneous rise of the novel and the newspaper and the nation, Anderson remarks:

The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history. (26)

Anderson’s thesis, which has already been discussed as part of discursivity and narrativity inherent in the idea of nation in section V of chapter 2, certainly refers to the realistic novel. The idea of homogenous empty time and progression along an axis of linear time is common to both the nation and the realistic novel.

In *Contemporary Fiction*, Jago Morrison identifies time (and narrative) as one of the contextual frameworks necessary for the study of contemporary novels. From Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century to the work of some contemporary novelists, Morrison briefly surveys the influences that have problematised the easy assumption about time. In his opinion, “time has emerged as one of the central issues that need to be grappled with in contemporary fiction” (26). He considers the status of fiction vis-à-vis the problematisation of absolute time and remarks:

It could be argued, in defence of fiction, that the novel’s flexibility and imaginative dynamics make it an unusually effective vehicle for exploring concerns about time, memory and history which are widespread throughout many areas of culture and society. (38-9)

Further, Morrison poses a pertinent question: “In the wake of changing perceptions of time and social space, how are we to reconceive and reconstruct our personal and collective histories?” (39). Though Morrison does not select a novel of Ghosh for examination, this hardly requires telling that the issues raised by him regarding time seem apposite with the concerns raised in *The Shadow Lines*. The narrative of Ghosh’s novel grapples with the construction of time in a manner that destabilizes these simple equations. The novel has many time zones and incidents from different time zones break forth on to the narrative unannounced. Jon Mee has identified “at least three basic time frames in the novel, each of which, as it were, leak into the other” (“Burthen” 92). Significantly, these time zones seamlessly flow into one another thereby challenging chronology and the presuppositions of historical

discourse that erect clearly demarcated temporal borders. While Tridib's death occurs early on in terms of real time, yet its narration is reserved for the concluding scenes of the novel. Moreover, the characteristic a-chronological narrative is symptomatic of those numerous instances where the narration of episodes is digressive, spread out and intertwined with other episodes. "Narratives breed narratives" (Mee, "Burthen" 94) and stories breed stories with such regularity that the borders between the different time zones are blurred into shadow lines. Stories and incidents from different time zones have a contemporaneous existence in the memories of characters like Tridib and the narrator.

Ghosh follows a strategy of 'embedding' where stories from different time zones enter into the narrative as part of another story. The best instance of such embedding is the episode of Ila's visit along with the narrator and Robi to a pub in Calcutta. The incident enters the narrative because the narrator wants to tell his grandmother why Ila has chosen to live in London (79). When the narration of the episode is complete, the narrative picks up the thread from where it had left (89). It is interesting to note that this embedding has been achieved without any change in the tense form, without any grammatical warning as such. Thus, the time zones are significant not only because they contribute stories to the narrative, but also because they serve as planks from which stories are narrated. Ghosh's novel stands out not only for multiple times of *narrative*, but also for multiple times of *narration*. There is no unitary and stable time of narration. In a sense, then, the past and the present have a contemporaneous existence in the *form* of the novel. It is exactly this loose, baggy, capacious and digressive form of the novel that destabilizes the foundational assumptions of historical discourses and realistic narratives. The division of the novel into two parts rather than into chapters is a part of the non-realistic structure. "Going Away" and "Coming Home," the title of the two parts of the novel, are tropes of travel and, hence, they also connote the shuttling movement of the form of the novel. This non-historical and non-realistic form has been made possible by the use of memory as the agent of narration. The concluding part of this chapter will develop the notion of memory as a repository of experiences, where stories are, in a sense, an archive.

In *The Shadow Lines* there is a continuous tension between the written record of events that passes under the name of history and the unwritten experiences preserved in individual memory and photo albums. This tension climaxes in the argument that the narrator has with his friends over “half-pots of tea in the canteen” (220). Faced with the prospect of his past and his memories being completely written out of collective public memory, the narrator reads through newspaper archives to rescue his past. But newspapers, being as they are the first drafts of history, are not of great help either. He is “unnerved by the possibility that” he “had lived for all those years with a memory of an imagined event” (222). This key moment of crisis is a gradual build up from the moment Ila and the narrator express incredulity at the other’s remembering and forgetting respectively. Ila’s act of forgetting is projected on to the larger plane of “the collective imagination of ‘responsible opinion’” from which the riots of 1964 had vanished “without leaving a trace in the histories and bookshelves” (230). The narrator has graphic memories of the bus ride to his school; of Montu not turning up at the Gole Park stand; of draining the water out of their bottles; of attending Mrs. Anderson’s maths class; and of the angle at which the rickshaw was kept in the middle of the road. These graphic memories, the narrator discovers, have “dropped . . . into the crater of a volcano of silence” (230). The novel focuses on this volcano of silence rather than on the histories and bookshelves.

Ernest Renan, in one of the earliest essays on the nation, touches upon the significance of ‘forgetting’ in forging national unity (11). It helps achieve the elusive homogeneity that every nation craves for and that every nationalist discourse seeks to uphold. Basically, it is predicated upon the simultaneity of experience that feeds the existence of the nation in empty homogenous time. Any experience that is not simultaneous can potentially rupture the apparent homogeneity into heterogeneity. Therefore, the need to banish all such experiences into a volcano of silence. The narrator’s experience of the 1964 riots in Calcutta is a classic instance of this. He discovers that his memories have been summarily written out of the dominant historical narratives that inform the worldview of his companions in Delhi. However, he resists such exclusionary tactics of the official history. Instead, he writes into the silences the individual memoirs in the form of stories. The triadic structure of ‘Imagination’, ‘Memory’ and ‘Stories’, that is the cornerstone of the narrator’s

relationship with his uncle, is again employed to highlight those gaps and silences. And, it is in this act of highlighting, that the family displaces the nation.

The displacement can be analysed in terms of a double bind: nation-history vis-à-vis family-story. Though the nation has been argued to loom from an immemorial past, the textualization of the nation is crucial for determining its success or otherwise. As discussed a few paragraphs earlier, Anderson has persuasively argued the significance of such textualization by locating the birth of the nation within the two organs of print-capitalism: the newspaper and the novel. The perpetuation of the national myth, its unity and its homogeneity requires a third form of textualization in history/archives. Palencia-Roth, discussing the use of memory in the novels of Marquez, remarks that “(a)rchives are, in essence, textual memories” (356). *The Shadow Lines*, again in an act of contrapuntality, shifts focus from the textualised memories of national archives to the non-textualized memories of family chronicles. The relationship between the Datta-Chaudhuris and the Prices does not boast of any written record. There is no recorded history but the stories and memories surrounding the family chronicle. The lone physical documentation that survives is in the form of some old photographs. One of the most exhilarating moments in this relationship, Tridib’s stay with the Prices in London in 1939, survives purely in the form of memories that are handed down to the narrator. The graphic clarity, vividness and freshness of this memory that help the narrator find his way correctly through London are a highlight of the whole narrative. Interestingly, the grandmother also displays similar clarity and vividness. She remembers perfectly well the arrest of a revolutionary in her college in Dhaka without any help from written records for the same. Her childhood memory of Dhaka and their ancestral house is still very vivid and fresh. The gradual movement of the car that carries the grandmother and the others from Dhanmundi to Jindabazar Lane parallels her own movement into her childhood through the agency of memories. Despite these similarities, the narrator’s memory and his grandmother’s memory differ sharply in that for the narrator his memory serves as a tool for reclamation, for the grandmother it does not. However, for both, memories have been predicated by stories. In case of the narrator, it is the story of Tristan told by Tresawson to the young Tridib; in the other case it is the story of the upside down house. These stories have unusual force and validity within the

narrative. This force of the stories in the narrative ruptures the linearity and the homogeneity of both the nation and its history. Considered thus, they also destabilize the simple equation between events and their written report that is the basis of a realistic narrative.

In *The Shadow Lines*, there is a great thrust on the act of ‘telling’ or on the act of ‘story telling’. Even Ila, denied the agency of memory, “could tell us stories about smart girls and rich boys” (76). The grandmother also narrates stories of the upside down house and the arrest of a revolutionary. As a grandmother, she has singular importance in the text because the motif of oral narration in traditionally storytelling societies has centred on the figure of the grandmother. While it is true of the Indian experience, it is also equally true for South American writers like Marquez.³⁵ Ironically, however, the grandmother’s act of telling stories points to contradiction within as the capacity to perceive and imagine stories has been withheld from her. Therefore, she is never free of received narratives just as Ila is not. While the narrative of nationalism shackles the grandmother, Ila is sold to the view that history happens only in the metropolitan West (104). Thus, though both want to be free, their freedom is only provisional. In *The Shadow Lines*, stories not only recuperate the past but also provide a way out of the received narratives. Therefore they are a means of attaining freedom. Ila and the grandmother’s failure to invent their own stories imply that they have to carry the burden of received narratives. May Price, to whom Victoria Memorial is “an act of violence” and obscene (170), is the third important woman character in the novel. To her, Tridib’s death is a sacrifice (251-52), and therefore, as extension and continuation of this sacrifice, she takes up charitable acts. Among the major women characters, she is the only one capable of managing cultural differences. Unlike the grandmother who takes recourse to more radical forms of her bloody nationalism as a reaction to Tridib’s death, May is able to perfectly manage the private and the public dimensions of Tridib’s death. It is essentially her imagination and an astute perception of the context that allows her freedom from the grip of received narratives, a grip that her brother Nick is not able to resist. She has also been blessed with memory and a power to tell stories. In a very significant gesture, the narrative reserves the very last story for her. It is she who narrates the events surrounding Tridib’s death; the story is wrenched from deeply painful memories.

Thus, stories in this novel are stored in the memory and circulated orally. In the act of their telling, they display the dynamics of the here and the now which Nandy identified as the superior quality in myth over history (59). This quality is powerfully exemplified in *The Shadow Lines* through the operations of the agential functions of ‘memory’ and ‘imagination’.



Chapter 4

Narratives of Science

Ghosh made a promising start to his novelistic career with *The Circle of Reason* in 1986. Though it is often looked at as an early text, it nevertheless continues to elicit critical response. The influence of an academic background, especially Ghosh's own discipline of Social Anthropology, is clearly discernible in the numerous references to the cloth trade, the history of science, the Indian freedom movement, the details of weaving etc. The novel attempts to wrestle creatively with issues that were at the vanguard of contemporary intellectual debates, especially issues relating to the dissemination of science and modernity in colonized societies. Ten years later, in *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), Ghosh revisits the ongoing discourse on the sociology and historiography of science in colonial contexts. The engagement with science and modernity in this novel can be observed at multiple levels—colonial history, medical discovery, subaltern history, form and genre etc. The novel is especially remarkable for its engagement with the genre of science fiction, which it partly subverts and rewrites.

Section I of this chapter briefly considers the work of some major Indian historians of science who look at the contested nature of science and modernity in the space and time of colonialism. These historians are seen to challenge unidirectional diffusionist Western models, and propose instead a reciprocatory and dialogic model. Sections II and III of this chapter take up for analysis the earlier novel *The Circle of Reason*. Section II begins with a short summary of the novel and considers the important themes and issues raised in the novel besides looking at its overall structure. Section III analyses the overall narrative strategy of the novel that breaks down rigid boundaries like the one between science and pseudo-science as the narrative grapples with the uneasy incorporation of modern science in the space and time of colonialism. Sections IV, V and VI examine *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Section IV focuses on the thesis that this novel is a deconstructionist re-reading of Ronald Ross's *Memoirs*, a text that implicitly posits the Western scientist as a 'lone genius'. This section argues that Ghosh's text centres on an epistemological break that is constituted in the decentering of the categories of knowledge and discovery. Section V analyses *The*

Calcutta Chromosome as a parody of or a play with the genre of science fiction in such a manner that it undermines the status of science in science fiction. Section VI takes up the question of the representation of the subaltern and the retrieval of native contributions to science. It argues that by employing a narrative principle that revolves around ‘secrecy’ and ‘silence’, Ghosh represents the subaltern subject as an absence rather than a presence even as the narrative resists falling into the essentialist trap.

I

The introduction and reach of modern science and technology in colonized societies had followed a distinctly colonial trajectory: it was part of a typical colonial binary biased heavily in the favour of colonizer cultures. The history of colonialism reveals that colonial binaries—colonizer-colonized, European-native, civilized-savage, historical-mythical etc.—and colonial structures of power enjoyed an almost symbiotic relationship as they thrived on and sustained each other. The two terms of the binary, invariably, arranged themselves into a neat hierarchical structure. The colonial binary that concerns the present chapter is modern science-superstition. The deprived second term—superstition—can mean related categories like magic and tradition depending upon the context. The category of science was central to the civilizing mission of the British; it underpinned the overtly stated, and the unstated, assumed superiority of the colonizers’ culture. In fact, science was central to European modernity, and as such, it influenced the way the emerging Indian élite fashioned their own modernity. David Arnold looks at science as one of the central attributes of Indian modernity and remarks:

Science was intimately bound up with both colonial and Indian concepts of what constituted the modern world; it gave shape and authority to the understanding of modernity. By the early nineteenth century, following a period in which they showed themselves relatively receptive to Indian ideas and practices, the British saw science, technology and medicine as exemplary attributes of their ‘civilising mission’, clear evidence of their own superiority over, and imperial responsibility for, a land they identified as superstitious and backward. (*Science* 15)

The historian Gyan Prakash also agrees that “as an instrument of the British ‘civilizing mission,’ modernity’s power, authorized by science, cast its long shadow on India’s history” (“Science” 59). Including the emerging nineteenth-century Indian middle-class as participants in this colonial discourse, Prakash contends that “scientific reason became the organizing metaphor in the discourse of the Western-educated élite” (60).

What made such a view tenable was the widespread perception that ‘modern science’ was born in the nations of Western Europe and then transported to the colonies, a more academic version of which was projected in George Basalla’s diffusionist model of the spread of Western/modern science in the colonies.³⁶ Though Basalla’s model came to be criticized on many counts—that it is unidirectional, reductive, homogenizing, and simplistic—it still remains a starting point for discourse on science and empire. His elaboration of the category of ‘colonial science’ has proved to be an abiding one that has occasioned many scholarly interventions. Basalla’s model dominated discussions, debates and discourse on the dissemination of Western science for quite sometime without any visible resistance. This may be partly explained on three counts: Basalla had merely articulated a view that had been current as well as consensual; modern science, in Basalla’s thesis, was ‘objective’, ‘value-neutral’ and ‘universal’; and he had reconfigured the classic binary of the ‘metropole’ and the ‘periphery’ in scientific and quasi-scientific terms. It was only during the 1980s, when the relation between modern science and colonialism was being scanned through many post(-)something grids, that Basalla’s model was challenged as unidirectional and Eurocentric. As David Arnold succinctly puts it:

In Basalla’s Eurocentric model, dynamism belongs to an improbably (homogeneous) West, leaving the rest of the world to participate only passively in the process of diffusion, unable to make any original contribution of its own or even to negotiate with an ascendant Western science. (*Science* 12)

In fact, similar critique informs the work of other Indian historians of science like Dhruv Raina, Deepak Kumar, Gyan Prakash et al.³⁷ Evaluating critically the social turn in science studies that came about in the 1980s, Dhruv Raina opines that it

has struck a resonant chord among third-world scholars who were grappling with related issues. The deprivileging of the sacred cow of 'scientific rationality' in its Western avatar provided an opening for critically re-evaluating indigenous knowledge systems. (3)

Raina further says that prior to these "developments in the studies of science in society," "historians shared an epistemic vision of science as transcendent and therefore, as culturally universal" (6). While these developments in the sociology of science successfully revealed the culturally specific and contingent nature of modern science, they also, at the same time, stripped modern science of the legitimation and authority vested in it by the colonial state and its supporters. These historians challenged the unidirectional flow implicit in Basalla's model that desubjectified native scientific cultures absolutely. Their studies, to quote Raina and Habib, largely contend that the recipient culture, in the process of historical appropriation of modern science, "subverts, contaminates, and reorganizes the ideology of science as introduced by Europe" (qtd. in Arnold, *Science* 13). Thus, they attempt to restore some agency to the native-recipient culture that was denied in Basalla's monolith. The model that is offered instead is far more reciprocatory and dialogic.

What does this mean for Ghosh's fiction? The novels of Ghosh display a constructive engagement with alternative forms of knowledge, history, narrative and social institutions. In *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace*, the 'alternative form' takes the shape of the family as it seeks to displace dominant forms of dwelling and belonging such as the nation. In *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Ghosh is looking at alternative forms of knowledge and alternative modes of knowledge production. Modern science and its uneasy appropriation in colonial India form the backdrop of both the novels. In the former novel, modern science is represented through the category of reason while in the second, it is represented through medicine, especially tropical medicine that emerged during the nineteenth century as "old Mother Europe was settling all the Last Unknowns: Africa, Asia, Australia, the Americas, even uncolonized parts of herself."³⁸

II

Ghosh's engagement with the intriguing relationship between Western science and colonized societies began with his debut novel. The novel is primarily the story of an orphaned young boy who comes to live with his uncle and aunt in Lalpukur, a remote village on the eastern frontier of Bengal with settlements mostly of immigrants from the then East Pakistan. He gets his name 'Alu' (literally meaning potato) because of the huge lumps on his head that resemble those of a freshly dug potato. It is chiefly on account of his head that he develops a curious relationship with Balaram, his uncle, who has a passion for phrenology. An avowed Rationalist since his college days, Balaram is a teacher in the village school run by his bete noire Bhudeb Roy—landlord, political leader, and a capitalist. During the 1965 Indo-Pak war the village witnesses fresh waves of immigration of refugees from across the border that threaten to put at risk the health and hygiene of the village. Balaram's passion for carbolic acid leads him to douse the village in carbolic acid to rid it of germs. This passion leads him to stock drums of carbolic acid in his house and the school premises that virtually turn these areas into a mini fortress. This proves destructive as he and his associates—Alu and the weaver Shombhu Debnath's family—are suspected to be terrorists, and in a police raid this mini fortress goes up in flames claiming all but Alu. Smuggled out to Calcutta initially, Alu has to eventually leave the city as he is pursued by Jyoti Das, a police officer. Alu goes to Mahe on the western coast of India and from there, boards a vessel bound for the oil-township of al-Ghazira. In al-Ghazira, he works as a construction worker and lives with a community of expatriates of mixed nationalities at the house of a prostitute and matriarch, Zindi at-Tiffaha. When 'Star', a mammoth building that they are constructing, collapses Alu is trapped in the rubble but has a miraculous escape as a giant cement slab is precariously held inches from his chest by two old sewing machines. Buried under the rubble Alu has his moment of revelation as he returns a completely transformed man who is busy at the loom and who leads an attack against "the Infinitely Small, the Germ," in this case 'Money'.³⁹

The community of expatriates forms a sort of a communist-socialist order where all income and expenditure become common. One day, when they are on their way to shopping together, they are suspected of engaging in subversive

demonstrations and are swooped down upon by helicopters and charged by riot policemen. Some die, some are rounded up while Alu and a few others manage to escape. They go northwest to a small Algerian town of El Oued. All this while, Alu is pursued by Jyoti Das from Calcutta to El Oued through Mahe and al-Ghazira. As the novel leads up to a dénouement, the pursuer and the pursued strangely enough meet at the house of one Mrs. Verma, an Indian microbiologist in Algeria, on the lookout for cast of actors for a planned enactment of Tagore's *Chitrangada*. She happens to be the daughter of a close friend of Balaram at the Presidency College, and, on her bookshelf, Alu comes across the copy of *Life of Pasteur* gifted to her father by Balaram. Meanwhile Kulfi—who has escaped along with Alu—and Jyoti Das rehearse for the play in overtly erotic terms. During rehearsals Kulfi collapses and dies. After long debates and contestations where carbolic acid comes to symbolize 'Gangajal', Kulfi is given a proper Hindu cremation in the deserts of sub-Saharan Africa. After that, Jyoti Das reveals that he has already been suspended from service and now plans to go west to Düsseldorf to his uncle. The narrative closes with Jyoti Das bound for Germany and Alu and others bound for 'home'.

Ghosh's first novel incorporates very conspicuous elements of magic realism and these elements have since helped attract critical attention over the years.⁴⁰ Aspects of magic realism apart, early reviewers of the novel tended to interpret it on the weather-beaten binary axis of traditional/village/native/stable culture versus the modern/western/scientific culture.⁴¹ Such easy categorization has turned out to be misplaced and reductive because Ghosh's fiction has consistently resisted and eluded any straitjacketed and rigid interpretative frame. The surcharged postcolonial atmosphere into which the novel was released helped shift critical attention to its problematical incorporation of modern/Western science in the category of 'reason' or transcendent reason. The recurring figure of Louis Pasteur courtesy Vallery-Radot's biography *The Life of Pasteur*, the dominant motif of Reason, and the rational yet near maniacal persona of Balaram complicate matters in Ghosh's first novel that, otherwise, seems all too obvious on the surface. Modern science is represented in Louis Pasteur and the category of reason while Balaram, whose biography straddles colonial as well as postcolonial space and time, stands for the historical appropriation of Western ideas and discoveries by the (once) colonized societies.

The Circle of Reason is divided into three loosely connected parts set in three different locations and countries. The three parts subtitled 'Reason', 'Passion', and 'Death' respectively are linked by the conspicuous and recurring presence of Alu and Jyoti Das. As the novel follows the trajectories of Alu's life through different places and different encounters, the genre of the picaresque provides an overall structure to the narrative. Loosely strung episodes, stories, incidents, characters and locations are connected apparently by the figure of the 'picaro', Alu. This structure is complimented and at times supplemented by that of the bildungsroman as the picaro grows from an orphaned child to an adult capable of organizing resistance to and declaring war on the dominant mode of social organization and economic production. There is however more to the novel than meets the eye. Behind the linearity that attends the genres of the picaresque and the bildungsroman, Ghosh's novel masks a cyclic conception of time that is revealed through an essentially cyclic structure: carbolic acid, sewing machines/looms and a particular copy of *Life of Pasteur* recur at key intervals to complete, as it were, a circle (of reason). All the three objects are peculiarly related to each other because they are the visible markers of science and reason in the novel. Their recurrence as symbols, tropes and motifs help hold together the structure of the narrative: at the same time, they are instrumental in narrativizing science and reason, especially in a colonial context. Moreover, the three terms of the subtitles are not restricted in significance to the respective sections to which they provide their name. 'Reason', 'Passion' and 'Death' are closely tied up with the three recurring objects across all the three parts in such a manner that the distinctions between the terms become very thin.

The persona of the Western scientist as a lone genius struggling against all odds to secure victory for scientific and empirical rationality holds much interest for Ghosh. In *The Calcutta Chromosome* it is Ronald Ross, the discoverer of the malaria parasite, while in the earlier novel, it is Ross's predecessor, the canonical Western scientist Louis Pasteur, the discoverer of 'the Infinitely Small, the Germ'. In *The Circle of Reason* Pasteur has no presence as a character in the narrative, and this is quite different from *The Calcutta Chromosome* where Ross is an integral part of the narrative helping it develop in particular directions. Moreover, Ross's *Memoirs* has been used as a key intertext in the latter narrative with passages reproduced verbatim.

In *The Circle of Reason*, Pasteur marks his presence indirectly and obliquely, through references to his scientific practices, and courtesy Mrs. Devonshire's English translation of Rene Vallery-Radot's hagiographic account *Life of Pasteur*. In a sense, Vallery-Radot's text and Ross's text, the first a biography and the second a memoir, are very similar in that both try to project the Western scientist as rational, objective, and a believer in the universalist principles that underpin the category of science. Both believed that Western science is objective, value-neutral, transcendent, and hence, culturally universal whose benefits can be reaped in equal measure by different cultures and societies. The model is again one of unproblematic diffusion from the West to the rest. Unlike *The Calcutta Chromosome* that has passages quoted verbatim from Ross's *Memoirs*, Ghosh's debut novel does not quote from *Life of Pasteur*. Only one incident from it—the inoculation of hapless Joseph Meister—is used to valorize Pasteur and his achievements (CR 28). Yet, *Life of Pasteur* recurs at key moments in the narrative and acts as the fount of reason that channelises itself through the character of Balaram, and the tropes of carbolic acid and sewing machines/loom.

The moment that Ghosh chooses to use from Vallery-Radot's text is, according to the narrative voice, a "turning-point in the history of the world" (CR 28).⁴² In Ghosh's narrative also, this comes at an extremely critical moment: after listening to Balaram declaim from *Life of Pasteur* the passage that tells of Pasteur inoculating "poor, hopeless ten-year-old Joseph Meister" "with his still untested vaccine," Alu has tears in his eyes (CR 28). For the first time in the narrative, Alu shows some passion and this moment binds him to Balaram in an intriguing relationship of reason and passion that largely governs the trajectory of Alu's life and the course of the narrative. As categories, reason and passion are mutually exclusive, one cancels out the possibility of the other. In the colonial hierarchy of binaries reason has always been privileged, identified with Europe, rationality and science. It is contrasted with its deprived other, identified with colony, irrationality, superstition and spirituality. Viewed as such, the appropriation of reason in the nineteenth century helped define Indian modernity. The role of science in forging an Indian modernity during the nineteenth century has already been discussed in the foregoing section. Western reason was the locus around which the dominant discourses of nineteenth-century Indian modernity articulated themselves. The important thing to remember is

that reason was always put in opposition to passion and such synonymous terms. Ghosh begins by collapsing this binary from within.

In *The Circle of Reason*, Balaram is the obvious representative of Western reason. A native of pre-partition Dhaka, his family and his teachers decide that “he had a gift for history” and should, therefore, be sent to Presidency College in Calcutta to study history (CR 40). For his teachers, Calcutta was the city of the philologist Suniti Chatterji and of the young philosopher, Radhakrishnan. But for Balaram, who is fascinated by science from the age of thirteen, Calcutta offers an altogether different cosmos:

For him it was the city in which Ronald Ross discovered the origin of malaria, and Robert Koch, after years of effort, finally isolated the bacillus which causes typhoid. It was the Calcutta in which Jagadish Bose first demonstrated the extraordinary life-like patterns of stress responses in metals; where he first proved to a disbelieving world that plants are no less burdened with feeling than man. (CR 41)

It was also the city where Jagadish Bose had taught two young men, Satyen Bose and Meghnad Saha, and, where, C. V. Raman had conducted his “quiet researches in the ramshackle laboratories of the Society for the Advancement of Science” (CR 41). Propitiously, the day Balaram arrives in Calcutta, the newspapers announce that C. V. Raman had won the Nobel Prize” (CR 42). And the first thing that Balaram wants to do after unpacking his bags at the Eden Hindu Hostel is to get a good view of Professor C. V. Raman. The image of Balaram, at this point, is one of a typical bhadralok, whose worldview has been influenced by the discourse of colonial modernity with science as the central attribute.

The evocation of colonial Calcutta in the early decades of the twentieth century is a highpoint of the novel and one that is closely connected to the depiction of science and reason. With its fair share of European scientists, Indian scientists, societies for promoting science, cafes and bookshops on the College Street etc. Calcutta is evoked in overtly scientific and rational terms that mark it as a progressive city. Marked by discoveries and inventions, Calcutta is represented as a colonial city vested with scientific agency.⁴³ When Balaram arrives in Calcutta and at Presidency

College, he is expectedly greeted with an ambience that provides a fillip to his interest in science. Immediately, he joins the “Society for the Dissemination of Science and Rationalism among the People of Hindoostan,” more commonly known as the “Rationalists” with the motto ““Reason rescues Man from Barbarity”” (*CR* 45-6). The Rationalists are different from the “Science Association” because “they did not consider science alone, something people pursued in the seclusion of laboratories, important in itself.” They aimed at “the application of rational principles to everything around them—to their own lives, to society, to religion, to history” (*CR* 46). In a sense, the endeavours of the Rationalists were directed at making science readily accessible to the masses, and rescuing science and scientific and rational principles from the clutches of a chosen few practising high theory. An undercurrent of growing nationalism in the form of the boycott of British-made foreign goods, and the attempts of some of Balaram’s contemporaries at rewriting ancient Hindu scriptures and epics to unearth parallels between those texts and Western science informs the first part of the narrative. Calcutta, after all, was at the vanguard of the national struggle to free the country of British rule even though the imperial capital had shifted to Delhi in 1911. Balaram, however, has his sights firmly set on different things. For once, he finds that the approach of the Rationalists under Gopal—beginning meetings with the chant “Hail to thee, O Cosmic Boson” and finding “rational explanations for various magical events, objects and creatures” of ancient Hindu epics—does not contribute meaningfully towards the daily lives of people (*CR* 48). Therefore, when he becomes the President of the Association, he begins with “the campaign against dirty underwear” rephrased euphemistically and alliteratively as “The Campaign for Clean Clouds” (*CR* 105). He shows the same zeal and enthusiasm some years later in Lalpukur when he first apprentices Alu to the weaver Shombhu Debnath and then douses the whole village in carbolic acid to rid it of germs. He brings the same intensity to his fights with his bete noire Bhudeb Roy and also in starting his “School of Reason.” Alu replicates the ferocity of this intensity in the second part of the narrative in al-Ghazira when he leads the whole community to use carbolic acid and at the same time declares a war on money. Particularly unsettling for the police officer Jyoti Das is the episode at Hajj Fahmy’s house where Adil-al-Arzaq and his cousin, after their aborted attempt to run over Abu Fahl, are made to bathe in public with buckets of antiseptic water (*CR* 314-16).

In Balaram and his nephew, Ghosh proffers instances when the categories of reason and passion collapse into each other. When, for instance, Balaram opposes the Gopal-led Rationalists' "Empty talk" approach, he advances as his argument the reasons why Louis Pasteur had come to science. In his opinion, Pasteur was driven by passion:

It was passion; 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)

Balaram tries to reproduce Pasteur's ardour and intensity for his own Campaign for Clean Clouds. From the colonial ambience of Presidency College, Balaram carries across the ardour and intensity to the village of Lalpukur. Further, Alu carries across the same to different climes and different peoples. This heady mix of reason and passion from the nineteenth-century Europe of Pasteur, through the colonial and post-colonial Bengal, to the near contemporary oil kingdom of al-Ghazira essentially vindicates Balaram's well-known stand on science and reason. Confronted with Gopal's retort to the accusation that Gopal's "mind is nothing but a dumping-ground for the West" (*CR* 53), Balaram articulates his view of science and reason: "Science doesn't belong to countries. Reason doesn't belong to any nation. They belong to history—to the world" (*CR* 54). Now, this notion of science (of course European) as transcendent, universal and free of any specific cultural baggage perfectly fits the ideological assumptions floated by the colonial state and its apologists. The foregoing section has argued how such a notion of science, born and reared in Europe, was used to legitimize superiority of the West over the rest. Such a view of science, especially led by the linear and onward march of reason and medicine, was projected to bring immense benefits to mankind. However, both Balaram and Alu bring destruction in their zeal to incorporate reason.

When Balaram opposes Gopal during a meeting of the Rationalists, Gopal has the premonition that Balaram would bring disaster if allowed to take charge of the society (*CR* 50). It is proved true as members, including his closest aide Hem Narain Mathur, desert the society of the Rationalists. In Lalpukur, Balaram starts his School of Reason with great hope and enthusiasm. For sometime, the school has a smooth run

with money accruing from the proceeds of the sales of cloth. However, the possibility of an epidemic breaking out looms when the village witnesses a constant stream of refugees from across the border. To fight this impending threat and rid the village of germs, Balaram settles for carbolic acid. In “carbolic acid, that masterly brainchild of Lister’s, Pasteur’s friend and Great Disciple,” Balaram finds “a kind of *historical* legitimacy” (CR 61, italics in original). Carbolic acid is employed on two fronts: literally, to fight the germs and disease because of the unhygienic conditions in his village; and metaphorically, to fight the feudalistic hegemony symbolized in Bhudeb Roy. Some years later and in a different location, his nephew and disciple Alu employs carbolic acid in symbolic gestures of cleansing. The germ in this case is ‘Money’ as he declares war on the hegemony of the capitalist mode of production symbolized in the Western oil companies of al-Ghazira. Both attempts end in disaster, death and destruction.

Throughout the novel, Ghosh employs Balaram in ironic and apparently contradictory ways. A die-hard believer in the universality of science and reason, Balaram argues that it is impossible to write a biography of the discovery of Reason. He fiercely contests his friend Gopal’s stand— “Even Reason discovers itself through events and people” —on the ground that reason is not culturally relative and historically specific (CR 38). Because of his conviction that it is context free, he freely applies Pasteur’s nineteenth-century reason to pre-independence Calcutta and a post-independence Indian village on the eastern frontier. However, he unwittingly undermines his own argument and position when he passionately articulates how his hero and ideal, Pasteur, was led to the talismanic discovery of the germ because the brewers of France and the silk farmers of Europe came to seek Pasteur’s help to protect their beer and their crops. Balaram triumphantly declaims: “That is why the world still has silk” (CR 49). Ironically, Balaram does not realize that his portrayal of Pasteur’s scientific practices actually clashes with the ideal he valorizes: Pasteur as a rational scientist, led by benevolent, altruistic and humanist motives, working objectively and rationally for the betterment of the whole mankind. In the process, it is revealed that Western science and reason have an underbelly that is historically and culturally determined. Claire Chambers connects this instance with the destruction of pre-independence India’s cotton industry to forcefully suggest that “Pasteur was

working in his own interests and those of his social milieu; certainly not for the good of what is vaguely known as ‘mankind’” (“Historicizing” 46). Chambers’ interpretation is brilliant because it sits favourably with the undercurrent of nationalism and the references to cloth-trade in the narrative.⁴⁴ Thus, through an ingenious incorporation of Western reason in the narrative, Ghosh challenges the fundamental assumptions of its universality that has historically legitimized West’s control and subordination of the rest.

Ghosh employs structural irony to undermine the science practised by Balamram. When Bhudeb Roy’s sixth son is born, the astrologers’ examine the boy and offer their prognostications that turn out to be rather bad. Dismayed, Bhudeb Roy comes to seek Balamram’s expert opinion. After examining the protuberances on the child’s skull, Balamram declares that the child “reproduces almost exactly the structure of the Typical Homicidal” and requests Bhudeb Roy to pray so that he does not end up being the first victim of his son (CR 24). But, it so happens that within a month, the child dies of double pneumonia. The infant’s death effectively proves that Balamram’s predictions, drawn from Phrenology (an example of early colonial science), are false while the astrologers’ prognostications are true. This is an extremely significant moment in the narrative with immense possibilities for an astute critique of the manner of appropriation of science in colonized India. However, this episode tends to be overlooked because the otherwise self-reflexive narrative of Ghosh’s novel does not develop it further. Astrology, palmistry and similar related disciplines have had a long tradition in India and are often seen as the index of progress and advancement that India had achieved in the field of science. While ancient India made remarkable progress in mathematics, astronomy, and medicine, astrology continues to exert considerable quotidian influence on the lives of many Indians.⁴⁵ Disciplines like astrology and palmistry, and to a far lesser extent astronomy, somewhat suffer from an absence of a framework where their findings and calculations can be empirically verified and validated. This is a possible explanation of why Western science, informed by the ideology of colonialism, was able to identify these disciplines as its ‘other’ and was able to discredit them by pitting its own empiricism against the former’s lack of the same. Balamram, a product of Western education, internalizes these as he defines his science (?)—phrenology—in opposition to these disciplines. But

phrenology, like Cesare Lombroso's criminology, is not considered a mainstream science. While it is true that both were used to construct a colonial typology and identify some of the dominant races as martial races, thugs etc., both have since forfeited their claims to being mainstream scientific disciplines. They are looked upon as pseudo-sciences that have been pushed into the vast graveyard of Western science's rejected disciplines and discredited speculations.⁴⁶ Balaram's absolute ease with Pasteur, a representative of mainstream Western science, as well as with George Combe of phrenology fame, a representative of peripheral and deviant pseudo-sciences, muddies up the discrete distinctions historically drawn between mainstream science and pseudo-science. At the same time, it also reveals that scientific disciplines are contingent and provisional.

III

The Circle of Reason has attracted a fair amount of critical attention that is directed at its structure and technique. Burgess's favourable review of the novel, that draws attention to its brilliant handling of language, also reads it in the tradition of magic realism that was trying to establish itself as the chief mode of literary expression for postcolonial writers. Since then, the use of magic realism in *The Circle of Reason* has been one of the chief concerns of critics, another being the narrative of quest.⁴⁷ As regards the use of the magic realist technique, Claire Chambers makes an important intervention through her observation on Ghosh's description of working-class conditions in al-Ghazira:

This may be seen as an example of social realism, both because it is a detailed account of the activities of working-class people, which are represented as being heroic, and because it broadly accords with research into labour conditions in the Gulf, creating an impression of verisimilitude. ("Representations" 39)

Chambers's observation seems apt especially when it is read in the backdrop of the powerful processes of globalization, which affected the oil-rich economies of the Gulf during the oil-boom in the aftermath of the Second World War. In a way, Chambers subtly hints that Ghosh's use of magic realism is different as it is tempered with elements of realism. In her paper on Ghosh's novel published some years before

Chambers's paper, Stephanie Jones adumbrates on the use of magic realist technique in *The Circle of Reason*. Situating the novel in the context of "critical responses to *The circle of reason*" (sic) that "have tended to read the text as too diffuse and too obscure as compared to Rushdie's slick pace and honed, precipitate, 'polylinguistic' style," she contends that Ghosh's text, unlike Rushdie's, does not threaten to overwhelm the telling of specific, peripheral histories (431, parenthesis added). While Jones concedes that Ghosh's narrative privileges "an oral mode of storytelling that distends and subverts the ideologies of empire and nation," Ghosh's use of magic realism is radically different from that of Rushdie:

But Ghosh's narrative—for all its patterns and circularities—more adamantly refuses to be brought full circle to sanction a fabulous sense of magical realism glossing the continuation of colonial patterns of exploitation and oppression under the rubric of globalization. (432)

Jones's argument is significant because it connects Ghosh's debut novel with his later works such as *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies* which try to contextualize globalization within the history of European expansion into the colonies. Moreover, Jones considers Ghosh's novel as playing around with the technique of magic realism, a technique that has been critiqued in many quarters because of its alignment with "metropolitan theory's inflationary rhetoric" (Ahmad, *In Theory* 69). In its attempt to capture the ebb and flow of quotidian experiences through the trope of magic and surrealist narration, magic realism has displayed a tendency to overlook material and historical contexts. Pradip Dutta makes a similar point when he says that "Ghosh never attempts to bulldoze history into some other preoccupations" (41). Situating the novel's technique "in the new space opened up by writers like Marquez," Dutta remarks:

But it is not enough to say that Ghosh follows in the wake of these writers. His novel also creates a new style, one which is less lyricized, more responsive to the specificity and multifacetedness of experience while evincing a constant intellectual curiosity about the life it unfolds. (42)

Ghosh's use of the magic realist narration in *The Circle of Reason* can thus be said to be paradoxical: on the one hand, it attempts to narrate specific and peripheral histories by employing magic realism; on the other, Ghosh's qualified and self-reflexive use of this technique critiques magic realism's propensity for dehistoricizing specific

contexts. It will be rewarding now to concentrate on the particular use of the oral form of storytelling that Ghosh apparently employs to draw attention to the continuing structures of exploitation and oppression.

An excess of stories and a predominantly oral form of narration has been a characteristic feature of Indian fiction in English. In a way, the trope of storytelling and oral narration are defining principles of magic realism. Most of the critics who have discussed magic realism in *The Circle of Reason* ally their discussions with a concomitant discussion of the trope of storytelling. The previous chapter analyzes storytelling as a seminal tenet of the overall narrative principle of *The Shadow Lines*. It is very significant because the narrative of *The Shadow Lines* is ostensibly realistic. In *The Circle of Reason*, many characters have been blessed with the gift of the gab, most notably Zindi:

They crouched on mats around Zindi, listening intently to every word. 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 from mere incidents to a palpable thing . . . That was Zindi's power: she could bring together empty air and give it a body just by talking to it. They could never tire of listening to her speak, in her welter of languages, though they knew every word, just as well as they knew lines of songs. (CR 212-13)

And thus, Zindi begins again her litany of misfortunes that struck the Ras. In the first section of the novel, there are stories like the history of weaving and that of the loom. Even Pasteur's inoculation of the hapless Joseph Meister is presented in the text as a story. Apart from Zindi, there are others also who are gifted with this talent, most notably Hajj Fahmy, who narrates the most significant story of the entire narrative, that of "Nury the Damanhour" (245-64). The manner in which Hajj Fahmy begins this story occasions interest:

Once many, many years ago, so long ago that the time is of no significance, an odd-looking man, a very odd-looking man, appeared suddenly one day in al-Ghazira. (CR 245)

The time of the story is a hoary unremembered past and the style of narration assumes familiar and well-loved forms. Almost certainly, this is the most fantastical tale in the

whole narrative. This is extremely interesting because the story finally leads to the cause behind the collapse of the 'Star': "No one wanted the Star. That was why the Star fell: a house which nobody wants cannot stand" (CR 264). Thus, by telling a highly magic realist tale, employing the narrative strategy of oral storytelling, Ghosh is able to foreground the contemporary structures of exploitation that mark the otherwise globalized world. This is a highpoint of Ghosh's narrative strategy and may also be discerned in case of other stories, like the telling of the polylinguistic history of cotton and the cloth trade (CR 56-57).

The Circle of Reason is a very early instance in IWE when a novelist is seen grappling with issues of the incorporation and dissemination of science and rationality in colonized societies. This engagement of a young novelist is necessarily limited, not the least because it happens to be Ghosh's debut novel. The novel was also released at a time when magic realism held promise for emerging postcolonial novelists. It seemed to be *the* only alternative narrative technique available to postcolonial novelists especially writing in the language of the former colonizers. Therefore, some sort of inevitability underwrites Ghosh's choice of the magic realist frame for an unlikely engagement with the question of spread of science in colonial contexts. This engagement remains mainly at the level of themes and issues. Ten years later, in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, these engagements become refined and sophisticated. It remains no more at the level of themes only as Ghosh seriously grapples with a particular genre of the novel, science fiction. Moreover, it comes to be wedded to allied issues like the recovery of the native contributions to science. The following sections will hence analyse *The Calcutta Chromosome* as a narrative of science.

IV

Ghosh returns to the theme of science in colonial contexts with his third novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996). The text of *The Calcutta Chromosome* revolves around a colonial fact—Ronald Ross, a British poet, novelist and scientist, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1906 for his discovery of the life-cycle of the malaria parasite, the research for which was carried out in India in the late 1890s.⁴⁸ The novel offers an alternative interpretation of Ross's malaria research claiming that a group of native laboratory assistants were far ahead of Ross in their 'research' and

conspired to lead the British scientist by the nose without his knowledge. The narrative turns Ross's discovery on its head, discredits his hallowed achievements, and foists a group of subaltern natives as the discoverers. In the process, the narrative of *The Calcutta Chromosome* puts a question mark on the relationship of Western science and medicine with the traditional and indigenous practices that already existed in the colonized societies, and were nearly wiped off during the colonial rule.

In the opinion of Claire Chambers, *The Calcutta Chromosome* “defies categorization and resists any easy summary” (“Postcolonial” 57). The novel is many things at the same time—a medical thriller, a detective story, a ghost story, a revisionist history, and if you will, a counterfactual history. Ghosh's novel has been enthusiastically received in the West as Western reviewers have praised the novel for its cleverness and readability. Tabish Khair reads these reviews as “bestowing a post-modernist aura of achievement on the novel” that revolved mostly “around the twin recommendation of ‘cleverness’ and ‘entertaining/highly readable’” (Babu 304). While the novel has very conspicuous elements of the postmodern, it is, as Khair says, clever “in far more *serious* ways that a post-modernist brandishing of the terms ‘clever’ and ‘entertaining’ can encompass” (304, italics in original).

Unencumbered by spatial or temporal limits, *The Calcutta Chromosome* moves fluidly across nations, ages and generations. National, regional or ethnic identities dissolve and fuse, events seem to be powered by a momentum whose forces are unseen and impalpable. The novel begins with Antar, an Egyptian employee of a multinational agency called International Water Council, who comes across the remnant of a half-burnt ID card on the screen of his ultra-tech and panoptic computer, Ava. The setting is a post-1995 futuristic era in a dateless New York, which has the grim and cheerless contours of a dystopia. The card belongs to L. Murugan, whom Antar recalls, and who he realizes, has been missing since August 21, 1995, while on leave in Calcutta. This sets Antar on a computer-mediated and memory-navigated search for his former colleague at Life Watch. At this point one strand of the narrative goes back in time to August 20, 1995, the day the garrulous and hectoring Murugan arrives at Calcutta to examine, what he himself calls, “‘Certain Systematic Discrepancies in Ronald Ross's account of Plasmodium B’” (CC 31). In Calcutta,

Murugan comes across people who offer him vital clues and, who at the same time, seem to be missing links themselves in a strange jigsaw puzzle. Most notably, he runs into Urmila Roy, a young journalist researching a series of stories by the octogenarian writer, Phulboni. As she joins Murugan in the quest, a third strand of the narrative is generated that goes farther back in time to the 1890s focusing on the European medical fraternity in pursuit of the malaria bug. In colonial India, Dr. Ronald Ross, a sergeant major with the British colonial army is also pursuing it across various locations in the subcontinent. Though Ross was still on the lower rungs in the hierarchy of the scientific community, he discovered the life-cycle of the malaria parasite and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1906. Now, Murugan does not take this “official story” and instead advances a “bizarre hypothesis” of “the so-called ‘Other Mind’: 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). Murugan believes that this group, consisting mostly of subaltern natives, was carrying out a parallel research in the same geographical locations without the knowledge of the colonizers, and was, in fact, far ahead in their research. The kind of fictive reconstruction that the text engages in leads us to believe that this ‘counter-scientific’ group was led by a sweeper-woman named Mangala while her man Friday was Laakhan, a “dhooley-bearer” by trade.⁴⁹ As this group did not have access to the paraphernalia of an institutional set-up available to a state scientist like Ross, they orchestrated Ross’s research in ways that would ultimately lead them to their own goal: Immortality through “a technology of interpersonal transference” (CC 90). As Murugan pursues this group, the narrative weaves through breathtaking and at times fantastic searches, reconstructions and discoveries that almost lead us to conclude that Antar is the ultimate discoverer in the text. But, in an eerie and apocalyptic end, he turns out to be one who has also been discovered.

Ronald Ross’s prize-winning discovery is the focus around which the plot and the narrative of Ghosh’s novel are structured. Though this epochal discovery, which held much promise initially, has failed to eradicate malaria from the face of the earth, Ross is nevertheless a symbol of the success enjoyed by Western science and medicine in controlling and, in some cases, wiping out diseases. Interestingly, malaria

is a disease that is generally confined to non-Western topographies. In fact, it was central to that branch of nineteenth-century colonial medicine that was practiced under the rubric of ‘Tropical Medicine’. Ross’s reputation as a scientist rests largely on the account of his malarial research published in *Memoirs* nearly twenty years after he had won the Nobel Prize. If one is to believe Murugan, Ross was a guy who “decided he’s going to re-write the history books. He wants everyone to know the story like he’s going to tell it; he’s not about to leave any of it up for grabs, not a single minute if he can help it” (CC 44). Murugan’s tongue-in-cheek style may occasion some doubts about the veracity of this claim, but the fact that Ross himself single-handedly steered his posthumous reputation is attested by his biographers, Edwin R. Nye and Mary E. Gibson:

One thing that stands out in assessing Ross’s view of his own self worth was the fact that he kept everything. He kept letters sent to him, apart from family ones, and whenever he could he got back his own letters from people. He kept cuttings, telegrams, copies of articles and so on. The Ross Archives, distributed between London and Glasgow, comprise about 30,000 catalogued items, all of which he carefully saved for posterity. (qtd. in Chambers, “Postcolonial” 60-61)

Ross’s narrative in *Memoirs* props up his reputation as a lone genius at the expense of the native laboratory assistants. As the self-proclaimed greatest living expert on Ross, the fictional Murugan points out within Ghosh’s narrative, the moments when Ross put down to his credit discoveries that should have been properly attributed to his assistants. Claire Chambers also makes this point about how Ross’s narrative wipes off the contributions of the native laboratory assistants (“Postcolonial” 62-63). This immediately connects the novel to the larger debates in social sciences, which argue that the spread and dissemination of western science in colonized societies was a far more dialogic process than is made out by the apologists of colonialism. However, these historical subjects like ‘Lutchman’ survive in footnotes and the margins just like the Indian slave ‘Bomma’ of *In An Antique Land* miraculously survives in the shape of barely discernible traces. In a revisionist gesture, Ghosh attempts to recover the written-off contributions of these historical subjects by offering a radical re-reading of Ross’s *Memoirs*. It will have to be examined if Ghosh’s text recovers the subaltern as a conscious human subject capable of exercising agency and whether he is successful

in evading the essentialist trap. As will be evident from the ensuing analysis, Ghosh structures his own narrative as a deconstructionist reading of Ross's *Memoirs* which becomes a key intertext in his narrative.

Memoirs upholds Ross's research as a heroic struggle of a single individual in the harsh and demanding tropical milieu. Not only do the geography and the topography militate against this heroic figure, even the colonial state puts up obstacles:

For Ross's part, the problems were numerous and real. His medical superiors were unsympathetic to his increasingly shrill request for research leave, being more concerned with frontier wars, public health, and medical care. (Bynum 47)

Ross had to sacrifice a crucial period of two months from his hard-earned research leave of six months as he was sent to the far eastern province of Assam to investigate the disease kala-azar (Bynum 48; Kar 3). It only goes on to reinforce the contention that even the European scientists working in the colonies were not expected/permitted to do cutting-edge 'theoretical' work that was the exclusive preserve of European scientists working at home. This reinscription of the geographical, and therefore contingent, upon the scientific informs Basalla's typology of the colonial science dependent on the independent science of metropolitan Europe. At any rate, this only confirmed and perpetuated Ross's status as a lone individual fighting it out like a martyr for science and scientific rationality at the tropical frontiers. Looked at as a narrative, *Memoirs* typically follows the form of the nineteenth-century European bourgeoisie novel with a white, European male at the centre. To challenge such narrative and such discourse with a scientist-protagonist at the centre, Ghosh had to devise a narrative strategy that would ultimately decentre the narrative, and the protagonist. Let us examine the literary and philosophic strategies which Ghosh employs in order to achieve it.

In his book on Amitav Ghosh, Anshuman Mondal is of the opinion that there are "three thematic displacements in the novel." (T)he first is the geographical one that positions Calcutta . . . as the site of scientific discovery" (56). "The second displacement, which parallels the first, is a social and cultural one. It involves the

displacement of scientific authority from the British to the Indian, and from the elite to the subaltern” (56). “The third displacement is an epistemological one that challenges the initial displacement or erasure of other epistemologies by modern scientific rationality” (57). These three displacements not only confer scientific agency to colonized space and colonized subject, they also help create a decentred text:

These displacements create a narrative structure without a centre; there is no central character or event (there is a plurality of them, each with equal status). The effect is to create a ‘marginal’ or ‘subaltern’ text—that is, one that embodies the paradoxical idea of a margin *without* a centre. (56, italics in original)

Without in any way disagreeing with Mondal’s contention, we would like to take the argument further by insisting that the decentred narrative structure of the novel results essentially from an ‘epistemological break’. This break consists in resisting the Western notions regarding the autonomous individual subjectivity of the scientist and the possibility of knowledge. As the figure of Ross testifies, in the grand narratives of Western science, the individual scientist is the fount of all discoveries and inventions. In other words, he is the creator of knowledge. Here, one can draw a parallel with the post-structuralist thinker Michael Foucault’s articulation of the notion of ‘author’ in his influential essay “What is an author?”

The coming into being of the notion of ‘author’ constitutes the privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences. Even today, when we reconstruct the history of a concept, literary genre, or school of philosophy, such categories seem relatively weak, secondary, and superimposed scissions in comparison with the solid and fundamental unit of the author and the work. (“What” 174)

This parallelism does not necessarily involve a conflation of the categories of the scientist and the author. As producers of knowledge, both have their distinctive positions in the discourse of epistemology. Yet, the notion of the all-powerful and all-controlling author in Western epistemology, as articulated above by Foucault, corroborates the hypothesis that scientific knowledge was thought to originate in the persona of the individual scientist.⁵⁰ Hence, the argument that Ronald Ross’s

individual discovery, as an index of the success and achievements of modern science, is written at the heart of Western scientific and medical discourses.

Basically, this position begins from the premise that everything that is there to be known can be known. But, as part of the counter-scientific cult, Ghosh introduces a group that begins with the apparently contradictory premise that “(K)nowledge couldn’t begin without acknowledging the impossibility of knowledge” (CC 88). Further,

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: you only know its history. (CC 88)

This group has forfeited all claims to knowledge, yet it persists in its chase of the malaria bug that will ultimately make the technology for interpersonal transference possible. Surely then, the group is after some form of knowledge that, tentatively, might be called ‘counter-knowledge’. As Murugan says: “Not making sense is what it’s about—conventional sense that is” (CC 88). In one of his interviews, Ghosh says that the idea that “in a world where everything is known, how do you become what is not known, how do you escape the omniscient gaze?” began to fascinate him (Chambers, “Absolute” 30). And that is how the group in *The Calcutta chromosome* came into existence. To escape the tyranny of the omniscient and the omnipotent Western gaze, the group devises a “counter-epistemology” that challenges and subverts two fundamental constructs of the Western gaze: the notion of an individual, autonomous subjectivity at the centre of all scientific discourses; and a claim to knowledge that works through the process of putting ideas into language, i.e. through documentation.⁵¹

This counter-epistemology begins from the premise that knowledge (or, rather, counter-knowledge) is not the demesne of any individual, but it is a shared space, participated in by all. The espousal of this tenet takes place in a scene that “in colonial discourses . . . would be described as a scene of human sacrifice” (Khair, *Babu* 306). Further, according to Khair, “human sacrifice is probably the most extreme metaphor of non-European (whether Indian or ‘Red Indian’) otherness” (306). This act of human sacrifice is taken over and reinscribed in such a way that “it becomes . . . a

planned means of personal improvement and collective well-being” (307). That Ghosh uses this scene to topple the Enlightenment hegemony over knowledge and its sites of production parallels, in some respects, the methodology deployed by his counter-scientific group. It also forms an integral and strategic part of his overall narrative strategy, a discussion of which will be initiated in the next section. The pivotal scene is also intriguing because it radiates a sense of community, otherwise so lacking in the narrative. The community in the scene has a heterogeneous composition:

(I)t seemed like a strangely motley assortment of people: men in patched lungis, a handful of brightly painted women in cheap nylon sarees, a few young students, several prim-looking middle-class women—people you would never expect to see together. (CC 138)

To cap it all is Mrs. Aratounian, of Armenian extraction, the then current incarnation of Mangala. It is clear that Mrs. Aratounian enjoys a position of preeminence in the crowd. Yet, it does not suggest that the composition of this motley crowd is informed by hierarchical power-structures. The scene curiously radiates a sense of camaraderie and willful participation. At best, Mrs. Aratounian is the selected or the chosen one for performing a ritual on behalf of the group. Let us contrast this scene with another where the state scientist Ross, “in uniform,” is “hunched over the microscope” with “a swarm of orderlies buzzing around him” (CC 58). An absence of community, a lack of participation, and the presence of a rigid hierarchical power-structure in the second scene strikes us in the face. Now what happens if we juxtapose contrapuntally both these scenes which capture moments of furtherance of knowledge. The result is a decentring of the category of knowledge. This epistemological decentring of knowledge mirrors the narrative that is also at the same time decentred as there is neither a central character nor a central incident to it.⁵²

Ghosh’s novel carries the subtitle—“A Novel of Fevers, Delirium and Discovery”. While the first two terms, ‘Fever’ and ‘Delirium’, are connected in that the latter is generally caused by an advanced stage of the former, the third, ‘Discovery’, seems to offer a contrast. All the stages are, however, accompanied by some degree of excitement. Many characters in the novel suffer from fever and delirium. Both Antar and Murugan contract malaria and so does Ross. Murugan even

had syphilis and it is alleged that Mangala and Laakhan also were syphilitic. Even the pigeons “were slumped on the floors of their cages shivering, evidently near death” (CC 125). Farley does not exactly have fever, but is “in a state of feverish anticipation” while boarding a train for Calcutta (CC 117). Murugan, during the only night he spent at Calcutta before disappearing, has hallucinations while in a delirious state. Antar, especially towards the end of the narrative, begins to relapse into a delirious state. As regards discovery, there are also quite a few characters who are engaged in it: Ross, Farley, and a number of other Western scientists. On an impulse one may be tempted to note that while those who suffer from fever and delirium are either natives or subjects from former colonies, those engaged in research are overwhelmingly Westerners, both Europeans as well as Americans. Thus, a neat hierarchical binary of fever/delirium vs. discovery begins to take shape. From a colonial perspective, it very easily, rather automatically, leads into the classic binary of science vs. magic. The novel can be plotted on this weather-beaten axis where Ross symbolizes science and Mangala symbolizes magic. However, a deeper examination reveals that Ghosh resists the binary trap. What he does, instead, is collapse one term into the other, thereby making the boundaries fuzzy. The motif of discovery, so strong in the narrative, is seen to be not the exclusive preserve of the Westerners. After all, Natives are significantly engaged in the process of discovery.

Beginning with the geographical explorations (read discoveries) of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, through Newton’s Principle of Gravitation, Pasteur’s Germ Theory, Ross’s malaria research etc., ‘discovery’ stands out as the single most influential determinant of Western science’s alleged superiority. As a narrative of quest *The Calcutta Chromosome* is structured around many discrete missions which are interrelated in the narrative—Ross’s for the parasite, Phulboni’s for Laakhan, Mangala’s for the chromosome, Murugan’s for the secret history, Antar’s for Murugan etc. Despite this, the narrative basically hinges on two discoveries—those of Ross and Murugan. Ross’s discovery is a celebrated instance in the annals of science and medicine. It properly fits into the category of individual discovery which is suitably awarded prizes, praise and publicity. Murugan’s quest, on the other hand, is more participatory. Actually, there is no instance of Murugan’s discovery in the text to which one can definitely point. Apart from Ross’s stumbling

upon the parasite, the only other scene that one can decidedly point out as an instance of discovery is the last scene. As the reader is led to the conclusion that Antar is the ultimate discoverer in the text, there is a strange and eerie twist where he makes the discovery that he is himself the discovered. The discovery, if it is at all one, is credited to the group, the cult or the community. Thus, the narrative satisfies a fundamental tenet of counter-epistemology—knowledge is shared and participatory—in the act of decentring the category of discovery.

As seen in chapter 3, the family performs very important functions in the work of Ghosh. In *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace*, he configures the family so as to displace the nation. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is a study in contrast because, by Ghosh's own admission, "it wasn't about families; it was about people who were completely disconnected" (Silva and Tickell 217). There is only one family—Urmila's—pictured in the novel and it has a marginal presence, incorporated into the narrative not as a part of the narrative design, but more to provide a window onto the lives of populated, middle-class Bengali families that live in dark and dingy congested flats situated in the narrow alleys and bye-lanes of Calcutta. It performs the function of tracing the contours of Calcutta, evoking imaginatively the landscape of a city that was, during the Raj, the second most important city of the Empire. Families, then, are scarcely present in a narrative full of characters from different time and space zones. Yet, there is something that connects them. When Murugan spots the familiar logo of *Calcutta* "magazine's Gothic masthead" pinned onto the sarees of Sonali and Urmila, he feels "an instant sense of connection with the two women" (CC 22). This happens even before he has struck up a conversation with them. When Antar is at the Thai restaurant with Murugan trying to dissuade the latter from shooting off to Calcutta, "he couldn't help feeling an inexplicable sense of kinship with him" (CC 13). Urmila feels a sense of physical intimacy towards Murugan when they are sheltered from rain under an overhanging roof (CC 181-83). All these small links climax into the heterogeneous community depicted in the scene of human sacrifice. The heterogeneity of the community is also evident at two other places in the narrative: at the beginning when Antar thinks of "the other regulars" at "the neon-lit doughnut shop in Penn Station" in New York (CC 11); and at the end when he hears "voices everywhere," "as though a crowd of people were in the room with him" (CC 256). In

this respect, *The Calcutta Chromosome* is very similar to *The Circle of Reason* as the latter has a large heterogeneous community of expatriates of different nationalities living in the Gulf. To be sure, the community in Ghosh's first novel is more explicit and pronounced than in *The Calcutta Chromosome*. However, the community performs a significant function in *The Calcutta Chromosome*: it is as an important medium and element that works towards the decentering of knowledge. We could now turn to an investigation of the structure of discovery.

What is the structure of discovery? Discovery is basically structured on the binary principle. There is a subject—who discovers—and there is an object, who/which is discovered. While the subject is always a human subject the object may or may not be human. For instance, Pasteur's discovery of the germ and Newton's discovery of the gravitational law are instances when the objects of discovery are non-human. On the other hand, to give an example from detective fiction, in a Sherlock Holmes murder mystery, the object is invariably human. The distinction is, however, not always so discrete. In Columbus's discovery of America, the object consists of both—the geographical landmass as the non-human and the Red Indian tribes as the human. It is a different matter altogether that this discovery has been hailed and glorified in terms of the geographical at the expense of the human. Again, sometimes it may so happen that while the object of discovery is non-human, the site of discovery is human, precisely the human body.⁵³ Ross's discovery of the malaria parasite is a classic example of it. Considered thus, three features of discovery as inhabiting a binary structure stand out: it is hierarchical, the object being the 'other'; it is unidirectional because agency rests with the subject and hence, knowledge and everything else flows from the subject to the object; and the boundaries dividing both are rigid, stratified and inviolable.

This formulation bears striking resemblance to the binary of Western/modern science and colonial science posited in Basalla's essay. It is hierarchical because the former is 'high science' practised in the metropolitan centre while the latter is 'low science' practised in the colonial periphery. Moreover, the latter is dependent on the former. It is unidirectional because knowledge 'diffuses' from the 'active' centre to the 'passive' periphery. And, it has very rigid demarcations. One may suitably alter

Basalla's model to include indigenous forms of knowledge production in colonized societies into the second term so that the binary reverts to the classic colonial one of the West versus the Rest. Colonial and imperial accounts of indigenous Indian society often portray India as a tabula rasa where Western science and medicine had an unimpeded diffusion. It completely disregards, and at times obliterates, the fact that

countries like India and China had a long scientific and technological tradition of their own. Indigenous traditions did not simply evaporate with the first warming rays of an occidental sun: they were initially the subject of close, often appreciative, European scrutiny, and, though in India they were increasingly marginalised during the course of the nineteenth century, they continued to play a vital practical and ideological role. (Arnold, *Science* 12)

This is more true of medicine because India had living traditions of Ayurveda (Hindu) and Yunani (Muslim) medical practitioners in the forms of 'vaid's and 'hakims' respectively which continue to this day. These practitioners had even exerted claims upon the native body that came into direct conflict and confrontation with practices of Western medicine initiated by the colonial state especially during the plague outbreaks in the 1890s. Therefore, in rescuing subjects like Lutchman from the margins of authoritative narratives like Ross's *Memoirs*, Ghosh's objective is clearly the retrieval of erased indigenous practices and modes of knowledge production. He does it by destabilizing the otherwise stable binary structure of discovery as discussed above. Basically, he collapses the two terms of the binary into each other as he proffers imaginative challenges to the category of discovery on all the three counts outlined in the preceding paragraph.

Ross's predecessor at Calcutta, Dr. Cunningham, is an easy-going gentleman who has since lost interest in research. He has a knack of picking up his bearers and assistants from the crowd in the new Railway station at Sealdah. Because "(o)ne is spared the task of imparting much that is useless and unnecessary," he prefers these untrained and uneducated ones to "over-eager and half-formed college students" (CC 123). He finds the sweeper-woman Mangala in the same manner. Murugan, however, problematises it when he says to Urmila: "But then the big question is: did Cunningham find her or did she find him?" (CC 202) Now, if one substitutes 'find'

with discover, the implications of Murugan's question begin to loom large. Did the European scientist discover the native or was it the other way round? In a way, this is consistent with Murugan's interpretation of the malaria research of Ross. Murugan's thesis that a counter-scientific cult might have led Ross by the nose turns Ross's discovery inside out as he, like his predecessor, becomes the one who has been discovered. When Murugan is inside the net at Mrs. Aratounian's guest house waiting for the mosquitos, he has this strange feeling:

When he looked down at his body, lying flat on the bed, he could not tell whether he was waiting for them to show themselves to him, or whether he was showing himself to them. . . . (CC 130)

He is not sure who is waiting for whom. In other words, he is not sure whether he will discover or he will be discovered. To him, this is a moment of revelation. If we can stretch the argument to include co-incidences that the text abounds in, a pattern can be seen to emerge.

Murugan's discovery of the clay figurine in a little alcove on the perimeter wall of the Presidency General Hospital is a chance discovery (CC 36). Similarly, he finds/discovers Mrs. Aratounian's guest house "entirely by accident" when the "woman behind the desk had been trying to nudge him towards five-star hotels like the Grand and the Taj" (CC 68). Eliza Farley, who begins to crave for an access to a laboratory while at the cotton town of Barich, discovers, "by chance rather than design," the card of an English doctor that ultimately leads him to Cunningham's lab at Calcutta (CC 115). Had it not been for this, Murugan would not possibly have stumbled upon Mangala because only Farley really sees her in the narrative. The narrative itself begins with the quintessentially co-incidental word—"If". Antar's stumbling upon/discovery of Murugan's ID card is, again, purely co-incidental and accidental. These accidents and co-incidences, discoveries in other words, muddle up the demarcations between the discoverer and the discovered. The boundaries are no longer inviolable as one term collapses into the other. The other is not identified in oppositional terms as it is implicated in the self itself. This implication of the subject of discovery into the object of discovery and vice versa is somewhat akin to the different stages an anthropologist undergoes during his research in the field.⁵⁴ In apparently glorifying the native at the expense of the colonizer, one might accuse

Ghosh of substituting one binary with the other. But, Ghosh does not simply turn the hierarchical binary upside down or inside out. His endeavour is consistently to give the binary trap a slip. Ghosh does something similar in *The Shadow Lines* by configuring the friendship between the Datta-Chaudhuris and the Prices as unmediated by imperial and lingering postcolonial power structures (section IV of Chapter 3). Thus, Ghosh's strategies of decentring knowledge, decentring the narrative, and collapsing discovery from within, restore agency to the written-off and wiped-out indigenous practices. Instead of a diffusionist model that has been flaunted to determine the colonial encounter, Ghosh's text proposes a dialogic one.

V

The publication of *The Calcutta Chromosome* in 1996 introduced a novelty into the scene of postcolonial Indian fiction in English. The novelty consisted in the use of the science fiction form, hitherto unused by the practitioners of the novelistic genre who honed their skills mainly in imagining the nation through a multiplicity of diverse lenses. It does some significant things to the text that can be called subversive. Any discerning reader of Ghosh would know well that the novelist effects a change in the form of each of his novels.⁵⁵ His fiction is extremely hard to pin down. Ghosh's choice of the science fiction form, and his strategic use of the same, occasion interest as well as intrigue. Before taking up what constitutes 'interest' and 'intrigue' as regards the choice and use of the science fiction form in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, we may very briefly survey the form itself along with a slice of its contested history.

Adam Roberts contends that the "identification of a point of origin for science fiction" is a "fiercely contested" business (47). The contest is mainly between those who argue that the genre of science fiction started with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and those who locate the origin a little later in the work of H. G. Wells, and Jules Verne.⁵⁶ Some critics trace the seeds of the genre back to the ancient Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the *Bible* (A. Roberts 47-49). The difference of opinion, among other reasons, also springs from a lack of agreement and consensus regarding the conception, understanding, and use of 'science' in works of science fiction. However, despite all the differences, there seems to exist a tacit consensus that looks upon Wells's (and also Verne's) novels as the beginning of the science fiction genre

while Shelley's novel is given the status of the extreme instance of the 'gothic' and the fantastical. This discussion is not designed to rekindle a custody battle for the originary narratives of science fiction but rather to highlight two aspects regarding the genre: first, it emerged in nineteenth-century Europe and second, there is a clear preference for Wells and Verne over Mary Shelley.

Science fiction's origin and subsequent rise, plotted on the temporal-spatial axis, imply that there must certainly have been very intimate and causal connections between the genre and the society and culture that bred and nourished it. While this proposition is a general one that should hold good for most genres, the point of interest is that in nineteenth-century Europe, science and its powerful progeny, industry and technology, were increasingly establishing what Arnold, in a slightly different context, calls "aspects of global hegemony" (*Science* 15).⁵⁷ Industry and technology were, in many significant respects, displacing science per se from the centre of Europe's hegemonic discourses as they facilitated Europe's expansion into and subsequent colonization of newer territories and cultures. In her paper on *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Suchitra Mathur contends:

This preference for Wells over Shelley reveals two significant implicit assumptions regarding the science in science fiction: its alliance with technology and its positivism. (120)

Science per se does not offer many opportunities for engaging in fantastic speculation that defines the genre. When technology—perceived as a natural, rational and progressivist outcome of science, and quintessentially identified with Wells's 'time machine'—is employed, the narrative possibilities of the genre open up. As Mathur's formulation shows, Shelley's novel is disadvantaged and handicapped because its monster, with its capacity to grasp and understand theological implications of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, is a far cry from Wells's dehumanized time machine. Moreover, the monster's act of turning against his Promethean creator and ultimately causing his destruction raise serious ethical questions about the permissibility and morality of scientific creation in Shelley's text. Through these questions, "Shelley's novel embroils science in metaphysical debates and thus undermines the positivistic framework of this knowledge system" (Mathur 121). Shelley's text is a potentially subversive one because it resists the view that "(s)cience, in science fiction, is defined

by its empiricism and logical rationality” (Mathur 121). This surely must be the principle reason why *Frankenstein* is given the status of an extreme example of the then prevalent gothic; at the best it is referred to as a ‘proto-science fiction’.

Two more features of the genre—duality and difference—need to be discussed before we examine *The Calcutta Chromosome* as a work of science fiction. The term science fiction points to an inherent duality built into the genre: science as ‘truth’ is posited against a scientifically grounded premise, fiction, which may or may not turn out to be true. It works, in a way, like a binary structure of science/truth versus ‘fiction’ with clearly demarcated boundaries. An encounter with the alien or the unknown in a work of science fiction is, perhaps, the most exciting possibility that defines the genre. Whether it is Shelley’s monster or Wells’s Martians, most science fiction novels can be interpreted as an exploration of alterity or otherness. Roberts is of the opinion that “the basis of many critics’ affection for the genre” stems from “the fact that SF (sic) provides a means, in a popular and accessible fictional form, for exploring alterity” (28, parenthesis added). The subsequent portion will locate the interest and intrigue generated by Ghosh’s use of the science fiction form along the matrix of technology, positivism, duality, and otherness.

In her paper on *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Claire Chambers cites Patrick Parrinder who contends that central to any work of science fiction is a premise that “allows the plot to move into the realm of speculative fantasy” (“Postcolonial” 59). Parrinder’s notion echoes Darko Suvin’s formulation that in a work of science fiction, the “main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment” (qtd. in A. Roberts 7). Chambers opines that for Ghosh’s novel, it is the “fictional creation of a ‘technology for interpersonal transference’” (59). As a technology, it is not possible in the author’s empirical environment, but the plot develops on the speculative premise that there exists a group who has devised it successfully. According to the only character in the novel who claims to know it, this technology aims at “the ultimate transcendence of nature,” at “Immortality” (CC 90). By allegedly making possible the transmission of information “chromosomally, from body to body,” this technology allows one to ‘reincarnate’ oneself:

(W)hen 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. . . . What would you give for that Ant: a technology that lets you improve on yourself in your reincarnation. (CC 91-92)

Let us now train our gaze on what constitutes the author's empirical environment that serves as the springboard for such a speculation.

The technology for interpersonal transference is premised on a chance medical discovery that “artificially induced malaria often cured, or at least mitigated, syphilitic paresis,” and for which a Western scientist, Julius von Wagner-Jauregg, was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1927 (CC 204). It is one of those strange ironies of medical science when the cure is known but how the cure works is unknown: “To this day no one really knows how the Wagner-Jauregg treatment worked.” The scientist himself thought that it “worked by raising the patient's body temperature,” but it never struck him “that no other fever had the same effect.” At any rate “(i)t was a scientific scandal, and medicine was almost grateful to turn its back on it once antibiotics came along” (CC 205). This instance problematises the methodology of science that is said to be securely and objectively grounded in logical rationality as well as the positivistic framework which seeks to validate all knowledge empirically. Science—represented as medicine in this case—is revealed to be far more compromising and contingent than it is generally granted to be by its apologists. At the same time, this makes the all-important point that speculation and guesswork form part of science's ‘empirical’ methodology of arriving at definitive knowledge.

This last point is better and more forcefully illustrated through Ross's discovery. As has already been argued in the previous section, *Memoirs* makes a deliberate and concerted effort at cornering all the credits for the discovery of the malaria vector for Ronald Ross. Yet, the traces of contributions made by native servants and laboratory assistants survive in the margins of Ross's text and some of those passages, like the following one, have been produced verbatim in the novel:

‘Next morning, 16 August, when I went again to hospital after breakfast, the Hospital Attendant (I regret I have forgotten his name)

pointed out a small mosquito seated on the wall with its tail *sticking outwards*.' (CC 66, italics in original)

Though the attendant had pointed out the mosquito that was ultimately established as the malaria vector, Claire Chambers notes that Ross “puts the discovery down entirely to his own skill conjoined with a little luck” (“Postcolonial” 63). Luck also connects directly with Ross’s frequent use religious imagery—“Angel of Fate”—for which he gets a sharp rebuke from Murugan (CC 66). While Ross’s use of religious imagery is discussed later, the narrative challenges Ross’s celebrated discovery as being part luck, part guesswork, and part his own talent. Moreover, the extent to which Ross’s discovery has been able to wipe out malaria from the face of the earth is a question that needs to be addressed and answered. The narrative neatly sums it up:

At the time it had been widely assumed that this epochal discovery would lead to the eradication of what was possibly the world’s oldest and most widespread disease: an expectation, alas, that has been sadly belied. (CC 30)

Chambers, on the strength of Roy Porter’s research into the malaria epidemic, says that “malaria is becoming even more virulent in third-world countries” (“Postcolonial” 66). The possibilities that this discovery had promised as definitive and factual have turned out to be ‘fictions’. Hence, Murugan gives a fitting riposte to the poem inscribed on the Ross memorial at Calcutta’s P. G. Hospital that celebrates his discovery and his expected victory over the grave.⁵⁸ Thus, the novel’s premise or the main formal device is predicated on two instances of medical discoveries—the former (Wagner-Jauregg’s discovery) discredited as somewhat speculative and the latter (Ross’s discovery) contested as part guesswork and part luck. This, then, does not meet an essential requirement of the science fiction genre which mandates that the premise must be scientifically true. At a very fundamental level, Ghosh’s text muddies up the distinction between truth and fiction, the two terms of a binary discussed as central to the structure of the science fiction genre. This act of undermining an important distinction, seen as a fundamental structural principle that upholds the genre of science fiction, subverts the truth claims of science that define its nature in science fiction.

Amitav Ghosh gives a playful little twist to the category of technology in his novel. Understood as a natural and advanced outcome of science, technology comes laden with its attendant paraphernalia and often intimidating gadgets. Since science fiction typically deals with space travel and encounter with/invasion by aliens from another planet, technology has come to have a ready association with futuristic spaceships and warships within this genre. *The Calcutta Chromosome* meets such a technological demand with its Ava, the panoptic supercomputer provided to Antar by his employers. Ava has a highly developed artificial intelligence that can retrieve information from “the horizonless limbo of her memory” (CC 4), that can make 3D projection of images, that can call “out the hour in the style of a village-watchman in Egypt, perfect in every detail, down to the tapping of a wooden staff” (CC 16) etc. It can also mimic human states like going into a momentary trance. This human-super machine interface set at an indeterminate time in the future seems to meet a crucial ideological requirement of the genre: its forward looking progressivist ‘gaze’. But, the premise of Ghosh’s novel centres not on the technology represented in Ava and its interface with Antar. Rather, the technology for interpersonal transference makes the novel cast a backward gaze into a colonial fact as Murugan seeks to unravel the alleged mysteries surrounding the scientific discovery of the life-cycle of the malaria parasite by Ronald Ross. In casting this gaze backwards, the novel also incorporates the extremely popular and recurrent trope of ‘time travel’, generally considered synonymous with science fiction because of the pioneering status of Wells’s time machine. The narrative also indulges in time travel into the future in addition to the gaze backwards within a framework of science fiction. The futuristic gaze allows the novel scope for an engagement with fantasy, so integral an aspect of science fiction, and frees it from being considered just another revisionary history in the garb of fiction. Its incorporation allows Ghosh to thoroughly interrogate the methodologies and practices of Western science historically within a framework that is a (by)product of the same tradition.

There seems to be an agreement between the gaze backwards and the technology employed as part of the premise. The obvious markers of this technology in the novel are the microscope, the slide, and the scalpel, all crude and outdated when considered in the context of contemporary technologies. Since the scalpel is used by

Mangala and also by Mrs. Aratounian as Mangala incarnate in the human sacrifice scene, it should, more than the microscope and the slide, be seen as representing the technology being discussed here. The technology is evidently crude, a form of ‘low-technology’ as opposed to the cutting-edge ‘high-technology’ usually encountered in science fiction novels. The exercise of this technology places demands on artisanal skills rather than on scientific skills. In the colonial paradigm, the artisan/craftsman is viewed as an indicator of ‘tradition’ whereas technology is seen as an indicator of progress and modernity. Historically, the rise of science and technology has been at the cost of the traditional skills of the artisan and the craftsman.⁵⁹ The artisanal aspect of the obvious marker of technology, i.e., the scalpel, is another sign that Ghosh is subversively playing with the fundamental categories that define science and technology in a typical sci-fi novel.

Further, the category of technology is deliberately embroiled with what appears like religious rituals. There are only two instances when the scalpel, as the instrument of the technology for interpersonal transference, is put to use: in Cunningham’s lab by Mangala; and later in the old mansion on Robinson Street by Mrs. Aratounian. Both the scenes also witness typical religious rituals where there is chanting to the accompaniment of cymbals and drums. The religious symbolism becomes more intriguing as the historical and material Mangala takes on the contours of a demi-goddess with a puja dedicated to her. What kind of a religion is it? The practices of the group, with its animal and human sacrifices unaccompanied by any incantations from scriptural texts, veer on tantric practices. In the context of the predominant Indian religious practices, tantric cults organized themselves in opposition to the hierarchical Brahminical tradition. Tantric practices were a favourite with the marginalized and the outlaws, basically the subalterns. It is no coincidence that the image of “Mangala-bibi,” with its “two large stylized eyes, painted in stark blacks and whites” (CC 37), closely resembles that of the Goddess Kali. A very popular goddess in Bengal, most of the tantric practices are allied with the worship of Goddess Kali.⁶⁰ The religious practices of the group in Ghosh’s novel are overtly subaltern. The portrayal of religious practices in the novel may be a result of Ghosh’s attempts to resolve the problematic of religious faith and a scientist’s objective outlook. By aligning religion with the supernatural and the superstitious, most

dominant discourses of Western science, including Ross's *Memoirs*, have ignored this problematic in the narratives of scientific rationality and progress. Such a resounding silence might have provoked Ghosh into incorporating religion strategically into a framework of science fiction that has traditionally barred the entry of such modes of doing and believing.

Is *The Calcutta Chromosome* a parody of science fiction? It is important to remember here that parody is a favourite narrative technique with Indian novelists writing in English: Rushdie uses it often while Tharoor employs it memorably in *The Great Indian Novel*. The discussion so far seems to convince us that Ghosh also employs it. While there can hardly be any dissenting opinion, it is intriguing to note that Ghosh's use is absolutely unaccompanied by any humour or any element of the comic. Throughout, Ghosh's narrative is very serious and earnest, without displaying any trace of comic self-reflexivity even when it is engaged in parodying the canonical genre of science fiction. Shorn of its comic and humorous moorings, parody is employed by Ghosh as a dominant narrative strategy in his novel. This is what sets *The Calcutta Chromosome* apart as a text of science fiction. Also, the distinctive use of parody as a structural and narrative principle sets Ghosh apart from those novelists who have used the mainstream variety. It is now sufficiently clear that Ghosh's interest in the science fiction genre is not contingent upon its alliance with futuristic technology. Rather, he is chiefly interested in its political philosophy that allegedly fostered one particular mode of doing science at the expense of all others. He is interested in the "idea of an alternative science, of a resistance to science," in the "whole phenomenon of how Indians do science, or how Indians relate to knowledge, and what the relationships are between a Western knowledge and an Indian knowledge" (Chambers, "Absolute" 31). Ghosh employs the science fiction genre in *The Calcutta Chromosome* in the service of postcolonial theory.

The ensuing discussion on the status of *The Calcutta Chromosome* as a work of science fiction will be rounded off by considering the question of otherness/alterity. Science fiction's dual structure clearly puts the onus of alterity on fiction. But, what constitutes the 'other' in Ghosh's novel? Let us persist with our line of argument that the two medical discoveries of Ross and of Wagner-Jauregg constitute the

science/truth, and the technology for interpersonal transference constitutes the fiction/premise in Ghosh's novel. Then, it inevitably follows that the counter-scientific cult, with their belief systems and practices, is the other in the novel. They are not alien creatures from a different time or space, but their shared secret code, their weird ways of effecting change/mutation, and their seemingly spectral presence mark them as deviant. As such, they are not only the colonial other, they are also, by the same token, the other of science and modernity. By showing that modern science and its scientists have drawn on, and ultimately effaced, the existing native traditions of medicine and science, *The Calcutta Chromosome* holds up science as a monolith that defined itself against the existing indigenous traditions. No such exclusionary tendencies are, however, displayed by Ghosh's counter-scientific cult. The epistemological practices of this group are also constituted of a motley assortment: religious rituals, magic, slide observations, guesswork etc. In effect, their practices seem to radiate a sense of 'inclusivity' as opposed to the 'exclusivity' of Western science, the overwhelming gaze of which they try to elude. The counter-science of the subalterns does not define itself in opposition to any epistemological tradition as the other: rather it collapses the boundary between the self and the other. One can only refer to the clay figurine of Mangala-bibi that has two large stylized eyes, a pigeon, and the cylindrical part of a microscope to show how the accoutrements of modern science are incorporated into traditional folk representations of healing. In a slightly different context, Mathur reads this in "supra-human terms" where the three worlds—human, animal and mechanical—come together to constitute a "gaze" (135). This can also be interpreted as a representative instance of the inclusivity that is part of the practices of this counter-scientific group. It "is clearly not anti-science: it does not reject completely the methods (experimentation) and processes (vivisection) of modern science. Instead, it appropriates them for its own purposes" (135). Hence, the counter-scientific cult that is viewed by the West/modern science as the other refuses to retaliate by returning the gaze. It practices an inclusivity that does not revel in a complete and total rejection of West's science and technology. This is how Ghosh offers his reading of the other in the science fiction genre.

The Calcutta Chromosome plays teasingly with the genre of science fiction in the ways discussed above that make it an interesting, intriguing, and somewhat

controversial text. Essentially a Western genre that upholds the triumphs of science and technology while at the same time pointing to the unlimited possibilities in store, science fiction has been turned inside out by Ghosh's concentrated gaze on the category of science as obtained in science fiction. In arguing that medicine—one of the most powerful and visible indicators of science in colonized societies—has its own “vast graveyard of discredited speculations” (CC 115), Ghosh reveals science and scientific knowledge to be far more contingent and provisional than they have been thought to be. In a way, Ghosh's novel can be interpreted as asking a very profound question: ‘Is it possible to arrive at objective and definitive knowledge?’ Murugan's reply to this would be an emphatic negative. According to him, since the act of knowing effects a change in the object of knowledge, the moment knowledge is granted, the object of knowledge has already changed. Hence, one only ends up knowing the history of that object. This is fascinatingly similar to Heisenberg's “Uncertainty Principle” which states that it is nearly impossible to determine the exact position and the precise velocity of an electron at the same time. The moment a ray of light of any wavelength is focused on the electron, the energy of that ray of light effects changes in both the position as well as the velocity. Heisenberg's Principle introduced an element of indeterminacy and uncertainty into debates regarding the possibility of arriving at definite knowledge. The narrative of *The Calcutta Chromosome* incorporates uncertainty and indeterminacy at the level of both the content and the form.

VI

This section will conclude with a discussion of *The Calcutta Chromosome* from the perspective of subaltern historiography. For a brief moment, let us go back to the discussion that the Western gaze is constituted by an autonomous subjectivity at the centre of all scientific discourses and by the process of encoding knowledge into language, i.e., documentation. The “overwhelming gaze” of Western science and medicine perhaps “basically consists in communication and documentation, in a word, ‘the written word’” (A. Prasad 58). To escape and avert this overwhelming gaze of Western science, the counter-scientific cult of Mangala and her associates “in principle” “refuse all direct communication” (CC 88). It is impossible for a group

from such marginal positions to offer a challenge to Western discourses using methodologies of communication and documentation in the hegemonic language of colonial power. Ghosh reinvents paradigms in order to surmount the theoretical and philosophical problems involved in the methods of retrieving, representing, and articulating subaltern consciousness. As in *In An Antique Land*, Ghosh has set himself the task of representing the subaltern that eludes representation. The weapons that Ghosh employ are no different from the ones used by his group: ‘silence’ and ‘secrecy.’ These two terms are viewed as negative qualities in dominant discourse as they carry the connotations of a certain ‘lack’ and ‘absence.’ The deployment of these two negative terms in order to vest the subaltern with agency calls for a suitable reconfiguration of the terms of discourse.

When Antar asks Murugan to furnish “a shred of real evidence, or proof, or anything” in support of the latter’s thesis, Murugan replies in his tongue-in-cheek fashion: “‘And what if I said that’s what my proof is?’ (...) ‘I mean secrecy is what this is about: it figures there wouldn’t be any evidence or proof’” (CC 87). Elaborating on the principles of a functional counter-science, Murugan continues:

‘The way I see it, it wouldn’t just have to be secretive about *what* it did (it couldn’t hope to beat the scientists at that game anyway); it would also have to be secretive *in* what it did. It would have to use secrecy as a technique or procedure. It would in principle have to refuse all direct communication, straight off the bat, 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, italics in original)

If we accept Murugan’s statement on its own terms, we can see that the counter-scientific cult employs silence and secrecy in not leaving any proof or evidence behind. For instance, the reigning deity of this cult Mangala marks her presence more through absence than presence. She is directly evoked but once, and that through Farley’s memory of the incidents in Cunningham’s lab written as a letter to his friend, which the panoptic Ava reconstructs. The letter records her powerful gaze that “sent a chill down” the back of the western scientist who took recourse to prayer throughout the night (CC 123-4). This is also the only time we are told of what she speaks (CC

128). Even when she reincarnates herself as Mrs. Aratounian in the sacrifice scene, her silence is broken just once when she mutters the final prayer (CC 140). This principle of secrecy can even be seen to work in those who finally become members of the secret group. Urmila Roy, in a conversation with Sonali Das, the actor, refers to Mrs. Aratounian's absolute lack of knowledge about the Bengali language (CC 93). However, Mrs. Aratounian uses "archaic rustic Bengali" when uttering the prayer in the sacrifice scene (CC 140). In itself, this can be overlooked as a trivial detail introduced more as a realistic note in order to recreate the setting and title, or as a chance error on the part of the novelist. But, we take it to be a significant detail because Urmila is ultimately discovered to be the 'chosen one', possibly the next incarnation of Mangala. Therefore, this detail reinforces secrecy not only as a principle of the counter-science group, but also as a narrative principle deployed by Ghosh to recover the subaltern voice.

The manner in which the two principal subaltern characters, Mangala and Laakhan, make their presence in the narrative is intriguing. It must be remembered that Mangala, unlike Laakhan (as 'Lutchman'), has no presence in Ross's *Memoirs*. She is a purely imaginative construct of the novelist, and as such may be interpreted, in Rosalind O'Hanlon's terms as an act of "'filling up': of making an absence into presences, of peopling a vacant space with figures" (O'Hanlon 191). Laakhan as Lutchman is a real figure in *Memoirs*, though with a marginal presence; there are fleeting references to him with little or no detail about his subjectivity and personality (Chambers, "Postcolonial" 61). He exists, then, purely as the 'object' of the British scientist's representation. In Ghosh's text, he is a nebulous and protean figure, with mysterious and multiple presences, turning up at the most unexpected places and with the most unexpected names. Named variously as Laakhan, Lutchman, Romen Haldar and Lucky at different times and places, Laakhan has a shadowy and spectral presence. In the complex time frame of the narrative, he appears in the early 1890s at the ghostly Renupur station as "a stray, orphaned by famine, with a thin, wasted body and a deformed hand" (CC 232).⁶¹ "(A)n orthodox, upper caste-man," who was posted as station-master at Renupur, takes an instant dislike to Laakhan and tries to kill him by switching points and leading him before an oncoming train. Instead, the station-master trips and falls on the tracks, and is soon under the wheels of the rushing

train (CC 233). This scene is marked by resounding silence on the part of the subaltern and survives in the manner of a little-known mythology: Murugan is told about it by Urmila, who had heard the story from Sonali Das, who in turn had heard it from her late mother, who was told of it by Phulboni, who in turn had heard it from. . . Stories are here seen as forms of knowledge, and they are circulated by word of mouth, not through any documentation. The propagation of knowledge or counter-knowledge strictly amongst the members of this subaltern group in the form of stories and through word of mouth becomes a defining narrative principle of the novel. Such oral and circumlocutory narration, also a feature of *The Shadow Lines*, subverts the linear narratives of science and progress that have excluded these characters. More importantly, such narration is designed to leave no proof or evidence of the existence of the subaltern characters, thereby recording their somewhat spectral presence more as absence than as presence.

This agency also works by grafting the marginal status of these characters onto the physical and geographical spaces that these people inhabit.⁶² Murugan thinks that these people are “fringe people, marginal types; they’re so far from the mainstream you can’t see them from the shore” (CC 89). This marginality is an index of their being the colonial other as well the caste other. Their marginal status is reinforced by the spaces they inhabit: outhouses, anterooms, houses under construction, tumbledown mansions etc. In these marginal and neglected physical spaces the community of these people meets to carry on its cult practices. At times, it is the railway station at Renupur, absolutely empty and uninhabited and almost cut off from human habitations by long swathes of the flooded plains. At other times it is Sealdah station, though it offers a contrast of sorts because it is the antithesis of Renupur. However, no purposive activity of the cult takes place at Sealdah though it functions as the most vital connecting link. Mangala, Laakhan and even Murugan are found there, and the whole counter-scientific group heads for the same station. However, Sealdah station with its bustling crowds also confers anonymity on this subaltern group. Again, the clay-figurine of Mangala-bibi is found hidden in a little alcove on the perimeter wall of P. G. Hospital by Murugan (CC 36). The marginalization of these physical and geographical spaces falls in pat with secrecy, their most potent weapon. Since this novel’s concern is to precipitate issues related to the erasure of

significant native contributions to the development of science, the marginalization of the subaltern characters and the spaces they inhabit must be extended to cover their counter-scientific practices.

On the strength of these arguments, it can be said that Ghosh engages with an “alternative politics of invisibility” to articulate a subaltern consciousness (Mathur 133). He resists the urge to make visible these otherwise invisible characters, communities, and consciousnesses at the expense of those who have traditionally been visible in dominant discourses. This would have simply meant the substitution of one hierarchical structure with a reactionary one, equally hierarchical and unequal. While such a resistant attempt exchanges the characters (players) and alters the power structures, in principle, it does not change the rules of the game. As Gyan Prakash says in an almost identical context, even the most resistant of such criticism “remains captive to the object of its criticism” (“Science” 60). This has been a philosophical problem that the project of Subaltern Studies has had to grapple with. In her perceptive critique of the first three volumes of *Subaltern Studies*, Spivak opines that

there is always a counterpointing suggestion in the work of the group that subaltern consciousness is subject to the cathexis of the élite, that it is never fully recoverable, that it is always askew from its received signifiers, indeed that it is effaced even as it is disclosed, that it is irreducibly discursive. (“Subaltern” 339)

She continues to hold this position as is evident from an interview she gave some years after (Landry and MacLean 289; see also, section VI of chapter 2). Despite the seeming non-recoverability of the subaltern, Spivak defends the work of the subalternists “as a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (“Subaltern” 342, italics in original).

The most searching critique of the Subaltern Studies project has been advanced by Rosalind O’Hanlon. For her, the recovery of the subaltern consciousness involves a metaphysics of presence, where the subaltern historian’s project consists in “‘filling up’: of making an absence into presences, of peopling a vacant space with figures” (191). Since this requires a theoretical consideration of the subaltern as “a conscious human subject-agent . . . in the classic manner of liberal humanism” (196),

does it not imply that “at the very moment of” the subalternists’ “assault upon western historicism, the classic figure of Western humanism . . . is readmitted through the back door in the figure of the subaltern himself” (191). Concluding that this practice constitutes a “slide towards essentialism” (201), O’Hanlon poses the following troublesome question:

Is this, then, another irony of history, doubly confirming the appropriative powers of the dominant discourse: that like the subaltern himself, those who set out to restore his presence end only by borrowing the tools of that discourse, tools which serve only to reduplicate the first subjection which they effect, in the realms of critical theory? (218)

Ghosh does not allow this to happen in *The Calcutta Chromosome* as the attempt to retrieve the subaltern eludes the trap of essentialism. In the novel, Ghosh refuses to read the gaps, silences, and absences that mark the subaltern in dominant discourses as an indicator of lack; and second, he reinscribes these silences and absences with agency that defy the terms of these dominant discourses. Since, as part of secrecy as agency, the cult does not leave behind any proof of their practices, they are also unburdened of the onerous task of advancing empirical evidence that Western science demands. Is he finally able to recover a piece of subaltern history? It is difficult to answer this question unequivocally. Khair offers perhaps the most convincing response: “In other words, what is ‘narrated’ is what cannot be narrated and it is narrated as what cannot be narrated” (“Amitav” 161). In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Ghosh can be said to have developed a sufficiently nuanced narrative strategy that allows the subaltern subject to remain a ‘theoretical and philosophical chimera’. The subaltern is present in the text, but the presence is spectral rather than physical. The subaltern presence is actually recorded through absence. In employing silence and secrecy for rescuing the subaltern and for articulating counter-science, Ghosh’s text successfully arrests the almost inevitable slide towards essentialism with which such an enterprise is fraught.

Chapter 5

Historical Narratives

Amongst the stream of images from global media that shape contemporary perspectives on world affairs, the recent sight of a long procession of robed Buddhist monks on the streets of Myanmar herded by armed soldiers stood out as an ominous indicator of the political and cultural life of the nation. The long military dictatorship and the resultant political diktat have made Myanmar perhaps the most closed and isolated nation of the world. The Golden Land of yore with its plural cultural history is now one of the poorest and the most xenophobic nations in Southeast Asia. Is it possible to trace the moment that marked the change in the history of Myanmar? Can this moment of departure, which has shaped the contemporary history of Myanmar and is intertwined with the many histories of Southeast Asia, be located and mapped in historical time? Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000) is an attempt to do precisely this: it includes within its scope an examination of Southeast Asia as transnational space shaped by contiguous histories. Ghosh begins with the fall of Mandalay in 1885 at the hands of the British colonial army (two-thirds of which was made up by Indian soldiers) as the point of departure, and attempts to dramatize the many interwoven histories of the region from the British occupation of Burma to the contemporary movement in Myanmar for the restoration of democracy. *The Glass Palace* is thus a historical novel and it records violent political upheavals brought about by colonization and the repercussions on the trajectories of individual lives through the saga of three interconnected families across three generations. The novel moves from a briefly glimpsed pre-colonial Burma to the colonial and the postcolonial Southeast Asia that resulted in the reorganization of imperial frontiers into national borders. It captures a history of transnational trade, travel and conquest, and offers new perspectives on contemporary theoretical engagement with globalization. By including unbeaten paths in very local histories and connecting them to transnational developments, the novel thinks beyond the West-Rest binary even as it attempts to critique the legacy of Eurocentrism and colonial capitalism. Ghosh's latest novel, *Sea of Poppies*, also trains its lenses on a historical moment of departure: the colonial opium trade that engendered diasporic communities through a process of forced as well as voluntary dislocation. A historical narrative set in nineteenth-century

colonial India *Sea of Poppies*, like *The Glass Palace*, foregrounds processes of accumulation of wealth that helped erect the British Empire.

In his letter to the organizers of the Commonwealth Writer's Prize withdrawing *The Glass Palace* from the competition, Ghosh makes two very pertinent observations: one related to "how the past is to be remembered" and the other to the exclusion of "the many languages that sustain the cultural and literary lives" of the countries that are member states of the Commonwealth.⁶³ Any reader of Ghosh's fiction will vouch for the fact that Ghosh's fiction has consistently engaged with these two issues and these have become defining markers of his fiction. One can hardly disagree with Ghosh when he writes in his letter that "(t)he issue of how the past is to be remembered lies at the heart of *The Glass Palace*." While it is true that a substantial portion of the acclaim for Ghosh's novel can be attributed to 'which' past he chooses to remember, the singular position that this novel enjoys in the oeuvre of Ghosh has to be credited mainly to 'how' he chooses to remember it. In a way Ghosh's serious engagement with the past has as much to do with what/which as with how it is remembered. Both *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies* fit such an interpretation. The present chapter will primarily concentrate on *The Glass Palace*, analyzing the different pasts, issues and concerns in the novel and the manner of their representation through a realist and linear narrative. Section I attempts a summary of *The Glass Palace* incorporating occasional comments on its structure and narrative. It also includes a short summary of *Sea of Poppies*. Section II, which is a longer section, discusses issues like globalization and colonial capitalism as well as the creation and representation of diaspora. It also includes a discussion of *The Glass Palace* in the light of Said's strategy of contrapuntal reading, and an analysis of the construction of (colonial) identities with respect to Bhabha's theoretical formulations. Section III is dedicated to a comparative analysis of the narrative techniques of both the novels, especially the ways in which realism has been used. It also offers a comparative analysis of both novels as historical narratives. Section IV continues the discussion on the narrative strategy of both novels in the light of Bakhtin's concepts of monologic and dialogic/polyphonic novel.

I

The Glass Palace has an ambitious temporal and spatial sweep. Through the five hundred odd pages that make up the novel, it tracks the history of Burma and its contiguous regions over a period spanning more than a century. The narrative begins with Rajkumar, an eleven year old stateless orphan,⁶⁴ who hears the sound of English canons “that was rolling in across the plain, along the silver curve of the Irrawaddy, to the western wall of Mandalay’s fort.”⁶⁵ Ghosh’s grand historical drama begins with the British invasion of upper Burma and the dissolution of the Burmese monarchy in just fourteen days in 1885. The fall of Mandalay is presented through the eyes of Rajkumar, who joins the commoners taking advantage of a state of flux brought about by the transfer of power and loot the unguarded royal palace. In the melee that ensues, Rajkumar is struck by the beauty of one of the royal maids, a young girl named Dolly, to whom he gives gifts and a packet of tidbits. The fall of the Burmese monarchy, especially of the feared and revered Queen Supalayay who is helpless and defenseless in preventing the loot, is recorded with photographic precision. (When Rajkumar recounts these events at a later date, we find him still grappling with the strange tendencies displayed by the mob: genuflecting before the Queen and, at the same time, looting her possessions.) The narrative freezes to capture this moment of flux, this moment of vivid realism when power is transferred from one system to another, as the Burmese Royalty along with a small entourage is sent into exile first to Madras and then permanently to Ratnagiri, a district headquarter town on the western coast of India.

For a substantial time from this point onwards, the narrative begins to develop at two important locations within the British Empire: Rangoon in Burma and Ratnagiri in India. The narrative strand that unfolds in Ratnagiri centres on the lives of the deposed Burmese King Thebaw, his wife Supalayay, their daughters, their native servant Dolly and the local coachman Sawant. “(I)n what seemed like an impossibly short time” (113), Dolly strikes a close friendship with Uma Dey, the wife of an Indian District Collector of Ratnagiri, who goes on to become one of the important leaders of the Indian freedom movement. This friendship is later translated into a family relationship through a marriage. Meanwhile, new developments continue to take place in Ratnagiri: Dolly loses her virginity to the coachman Sawant who is

also responsible for the first Princess's pregnancy. To the utter discomfiture of the local colonial authorities, the first Princess is married off to Sawant. While she holds steadfastly to her marriage, the second Princess marries a Burmese commoner. King Thebaw dies shocked by the news of his second daughter's elopement, and shortly after his death Queen Supalayay, along with her two youngest daughters, is sent to Rangoon where she dies in 1925. In Rangoon, under the apprenticeship of Saya John a Chinese catholic, Rajkumar makes his career in the changed political and economic set up of Burma. He begins by transporting indentured labour from South India to work in the oil fields and the timber yards of Burma, forages into the teak business, and steadily builds a fortune in teak trade. A rich and wealthy Rajkumar in European clothes tracks Dolly to Ratnagiri and despite her initial reluctance marries and brings her back to Rangoon.

While the Ratnagiri episode is effectively closed with Dolly's departure, the narrative follows the fortunes of three families through three important locations within the British Empire: Rangoon, Burma; Calcutta, India; and Morningside, Malaya. After the untimely death of her husband, Uma travels across Europe and the US, meets Indian nationalists, is transformed into an important leader of the Indian Independence League, and goes on later to become a close associate of the Mahatma after embracing the philosophy of non-violence.⁶⁶ While in New York, she helps reconcile Saya John's near-estranged son Matthew to his father. After Matthew returns home with his non-Catholic wife Elsa, he and Rajkumar begin a rubber plantation in Morningside, and they reap rich profits as the demand for rubber shoots up during the First World War. On her way back from New York, Uma stops at Morningside and then at Rangoon visiting her friends and also trying to elicit support for the independence movements in India as well as in Burma. The Morningside business venture appears to her like an empire of sorts within the larger British Empire, and seems to be modeled upon it. Since her political ideology clashes with the business interests of characters like Rajkumar, her trip ends in a bitter spat with him that almost derails the family friendship (247-48). Meanwhile, children are born at the three important locations who will carry on the complex familial arithmetic: the twins Arjun and Manju are born to Uma's brother at Calcutta; Neel and Dinu are born

to Dolly and Rajkumar at Rangoon; and Alison and Timmy are born to Matthew and Elsa.

Arjun grows up to become one of the earliest native officers in the British Indian Army, and he strikes up a close friendship with a fellow native officer, Hardayal 'Hardy' Singh who, unlike Arjun, comes from a family that has seen a long history of loyal service to the British Indian Army. The Second World War soon breaks out and Arjun and Hardy find their platoon stationed near Morningside in Malaysia. There Arjun comes across Alison who in the meantime has already developed an intense relationship with the amateur photographer Dinu. Arjun's arrival gradually leads up to a complex triangle involving him, Alison and Dinu but is cut short by the rapidly advancing Japanese. While the war claims Alison, Saya John and Neel, the Japanese army's advance into Burma forces Rajkumar's family to join a panic-stricken exodus of Indians that is remembered in history as the Forgotten Long March. Rajkumar, a fond grandfather, passes the rest of his life at Lankasuka in Calcutta and Dolly returns to Burma in search of Dinu and finally dies in a Sagaing. Arjun, who represents a divided identity and loyalty that was fundamental to the historical formation of the Indian National Army, deserts the British Indian Army, but is finally tracked down and killed. The concluding part of the novel portrays Rajkumar's granddaughter Jaya journeying to Rangoon in search of her uncle Dinu, who runs a small establishment, *The Glass Palace: Photo Studio*. The novel closes with a cameo of Aung San Suu Kyi and her resistance movement for the restoration of democracy in Burma.

We could now attempt a quick survey of *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh's most recent novel. *Sea of Poppies* takes us further back in time to 1838 when the flourishing opium trade of the East India Company was at a critical juncture because China had forbidden the import of opium. Though opium trade and its larger transnational ramifications provide the historical backdrop for the narrative, the novel essentially unfolds through two sets of characters at two different locations in nineteenth-century India under the rule of the Company. In a village on the banks of the Ganges near the opium factory at Ghazipur, the story revolves around Deeti, a young woman from one of the highest castes forced into the cultivation of poppies because of the policies of

the Company, and Kalua, a carter who belongs to one of the lowest castes. Drugged and violated on her wedding night by her husband's brother, Deeti is forced into sati after the death of her hopeless opium-addicted husband. She is rescued from the pyre of her dead husband by Kalua, and fleeing from the village they both sign up as indentured labour and board a vessel bound for Calcutta, from where they will be finally transported to Mauritius across the 'black sea'. Through the length of the Ganges, they are pursued by Deeti's relatives for whom this relationship of mixed castes symbolizes the defilement of their higher caste status. In Calcutta, meanwhile, the narrative charts the career of a former slave-ship the *Ibis* that is bought by a Calcutta-based British opium merchant, Benjamin Burnham, for the transport of opium to China. Changed circumstances in China force him to send the *Ibis* to Mauritius with a cargo of indentured labour and some convicts. One of the convicts is Neel Rattan Halder, a young local rajah who has lost his possessions to the British. As the story develops, the ship sails for Mauritius with a mixed cast of characters. Apart from Kalua, Deeti and a couple of her relatives who pursue them, there is Zachary Reid, a mulatto freedman from Baltimore; Baboo Nob Kissin, a native clerk; Serang Ali, a wily leader of the lascars; Paulette Lambert, a young Frenchwoman and her childhood friend Jodu. As the journey begins, the narrative is gripped with dramatic instances of treachery, plots and a potential mutiny. This part of the trilogy ends mid-ocean, off the coast of Sumatra, on the storm-tossed Indian Ocean.

II

In section IV of chapter 2, we have already discussed how narrativists like Hayden White have persuasively argued that history incorporates elements of narrative. White does not raise questions about the historical source and the historical event: he points out that the historian, in the act of ordering his historical data, uses literary techniques. For White there has always existed a dialogical relationship between history and narrative. The postcolonial Indian novel in English, more than any other genre or category, illustrates this. Whether it is Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, Sealy's *Trotter-Nama*, Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* or Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, history has held centre stage in most of the cases. The postcolonial Indian novel in English, like the narrator of

Midnight's Children, is in a way handcuffed to history. An element of inevitability underwrites this very productive relationship. The term postcolonialism carries along with it such a huge burden of history that most of the novelists/writers from formerly colonized countries writing in the language of the former colonizers feel obliged to engage with issues of nation and history. Has this been the case always? While the work of earlier novelists like Narayan, Raja Rao and Anand grapple with histories, past as well as contemporary, their novels never seem to radiate a self-conscious reflexivity about this engagement. One of the reasons for this might well be that history as incorporated in the earlier novels is a given. With contemporary novelists, history is a site for fierce resistance and contestation. Thus, this engagement with history is one way of writing back and correcting the excess that most colonial accounts are perceived to suffer from. It is almost inevitable that these works are looked upon as revisionist histories. Amitav Ghosh, an anthropologist by training, has almost perfected this art of revisionism.

Ghosh's engagement with history is qualitatively different from that of his contemporaries: partly, because he recuperates geographical territories written out of the colonial as well as the postcolonial imagination; and partly because he has penned till date two novels that can be properly called 'historical novels'.⁶⁷ Moreover, he has contributed a learned article to one of the volumes of *Subaltern Studies*. At the most conspicuous level, Ghosh's project of historical revisionism represents and (re)visits little-known or rather forgotten historical sites. Set in the early nineteenth-century colonial India during the reign of the British East India Company, *Sea of Poppies* reprises the history of colonialism through the opium trade. The movement of indentured labour to the plantations in Mauritius, and the subsequent creation of diasporic communities are major areas of focus in this novel. Earlier, while doing research for *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh was puzzled and dismayed by the paucity of literature on the Long March of 1941.⁶⁸ This is a point that is also made by Meenakshi Mukherjee in her review of the novel in *The Hindu*:

No school book taught us anything about the country's [Burma] past before it became part of the empire and I am embarrassed to admit that my first acquaintance with Mandalay and emperor Thebaw was

through a silly Rudyard Kipling jingle about a British soldier and Burmese girl. (www.hindu.com)

In a way, Mukherjee speaks for those of us who live in close physical proximity to Burma yet know hardly anything about its past. Displaying an evident penchant for little known and forgotten historical sites, Ghosh offers a differential history of the region.

The Glass Palace meets the requirements of a historical novel: it “not only takes its setting and some characters and events from history,” and “makes the historical events and issues crucial for the central characters and narrative,” but also uses “the protagonists and actions to reveal what the author regards as the deep forces that impel the historical process” (Abrams 133). While issues of the nation and history have become predominant concerns of the postcolonial Indian novel in English, *The Glass Palace* actively revisits and recreates historical sites that discursively suffer from either colonial excess or colonial neglect. Burma, annexed to British India in 1885 and separated from it in the 1930s, shares with India not only a long border but also a violent and contested history of colonialism. The presence of a substantial Indian diaspora all over Southeast Asia is testimony to dislocations engendered by colonial processes.⁶⁹ Yet, for all the contiguities, the region has remained largely unrepresented in Indian fiction, which Ghosh attempts to recuperate in *The Glass Palace*. As Meenakshi Mukherjee has pointed out, the non-Western worlds of Africa and Asia have hardly ever entered the literary portals of Indian Writing in English. The use of English language moreover conveys the impression of a homogenous Indian tradition which is then “pitted against an equally unified imaginary West” leading to “a dialectic of alterity” (“Anxiety” 85). Ghosh and Seth are the two Indian writers in English who break the India vs. West dialectic by introducing into their works non-Western locations, in a sense readdressing the entire legacy of core-periphery thinking. In the creation of a new model of representing the relationship between the local, national and transnational this novel may perhaps be seen as a possible attempt to provincialize the West. While this attempt is necessarily limited by the presence of the overarching colonial paradigm, even as Ghosh actively resists representing the Raj as will be discussed a little later, the novel’s real achievement

may lie in tracing the continuities between the neo-imperialism of the contemporary global world and the earlier system of colonial capitalism.

While training lenses on unknown or forgotten pasts is an important weapon in Ghosh's revisionist arsenal, positioning characters or incidents contrapuntally has proved to be a far more potent weapon. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said critically examines the presence of the Empire, directly or obliquely, in English fictional narratives of the nineteenth century. According to Said, "contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded" (66-67). Said's notion of contrapuntal reading can be extended to cover the nature of the critique that Ghosh articulates in this novel. Queen Supalayay is said to have ordered the murder of nearly a hundred of her husband's relatives to secure the throne for her husband, Thebaw. In an article, Kenneth Champeon discovers that "(T)he adjectives applied to the young Supayalat are fairly consistent across histories." Some of the adjectives that he refers to are "vain, domineering, vindictive, unforgiving, imperious" (<http://www.irrawaddy.org>). The portrait of Queen Supalayay in the novel is not wide off the mark, after all. Even Uma is aware of this and one day she asks Dolly whether the latter does not feel frightened in living with such a woman (113-14). To this, Dolly points to a picture hanging by Uma's front door and replies:

'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.' (114)

Unable to come to grips with a completely novel perspective of the Empire, she takes down the picture after some days and sends it to her husband's office. Her gesture seems highly appropriate as the portrait is sent to the office of the man who has largely shaped her perception of the Empire. Uma's first gesture of resistance is one of the most redeeming moments in the novel, and it prophetically anticipates, in the later part of the narrative, her political stance vis-à-vis British colonization:

'(W)e must *not* be deceived by the idea that imperialism is an enterprise of reform. Colonialists would like us to believe this, but there is a simple and clear refutation. . . . It is simply mistaken to imagine that colonialists sit down and ponder the rights and wrongs of

the societies they what to conquer: that is not why empires are built.’
(294-95, italics in original)⁷⁰

The ruthlessness of imperial aspirations written out of Western narratives and colonial accounts is wrested back into the narrative through Queen Victoria’s portrait that is placed in a contrapuntal relation with the oriental Queen. One may read this episode as turning a colonial binary inside out. But Ghosh is known not to take recourse to such easy and reductive means because that amounts to substituting one binary with another. The fundamental hierarchical relationship of power is still retained. Rather he proceeds by problematising the category altogether. We shall now look at the representation and construction of colonialism in both the novels.

It goes without saying that colonialism is one of the biggest issues in both the novels. But is Ghosh interested in colonialism per se? Surprisingly in *The Glass Palace*, there is no typical colonizer subject and neither is there any visible structure of colonialism. The visible structures of colonialism are held in abeyance to create a brooding and overarching presence. Unlike Forster’s *A Passage to India*, there is no Chandrapore with a British cantonment and nor are there characters like Ronnie. Lt. Col. ‘Bucky’ Buckland is the only British character who has been drawn at some length. But he is far from being a typical colonizer and does not play a significant role in the unfolding of the action. Apart from the presence of soldiers during the takeover of Mandalay, the narrative has hardly any presence of visible colonial institutions. In *Sea of Poppies*, however, there is at least Benjamin Burnham who mouths the ideology of imperialism and advocates the use of force against the Chinese. More importantly, there are courts of law and even a trial which ends in the conviction and punishment of a local rajah. It must be borne in mind that law courts were one of the most visible institutions of colonialism: they checked resistance to and dissent against the colonial state, and also helped prop up the alleged reformist face of colonialism by functioning as the visible symbols of justice. Thus, while the representation of colonialism in the earlier novel is indirect and oblique, it is visible and relatively direct in the later novel. The representation in *The Glass Palace* rather traces colonialism’s effects on individual lives, communities and nature. The same holds true for the large historical forces that shape the contours of individual lives, families and communities. This is a defining aspect of the novel’s narration and conforms

aply to its classification as an epic. (Sections III and IV offer a detailed analysis of the narration and the narrative.) This act of withdrawal of visible physical markers of colonialism from Ghosh's narrative constitutes, in a sense, an 'absence', which is then contrapuntally set off against large scale events set into motion by the Raj that constitute a 'presence'. Ghosh offers his contrapuntal reading through the act of writing in this double bind of absence and presence.

In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh opens up a new front altogether, that of natural history. Ghosh has documented the systematic exploitation of teak forests in Burma with unerring accuracy and precision. Though Ghosh is known for his seriousness and for the research that accompanies his every novel, one is still struck by the long passages on teak trade in Burma. Ghosh extends this to cover rubber plantations in Malaysia and the explorations for oil in Burma. Though these two areas are not as well worked out as the teak trade, nevertheless, they together point to the upheaval that came about as a result of colonial exploitation of natural resources. In the three-phase diffusionist model of Western science, Basalla contends that botany and zoology followed by geology and geography were the earliest sciences used by the European colonizers to survey and map the colonized territories. This was commensurate with the commercially exploitative character of the colonial enterprise that systematically exploited natural resources in the colonies. In November 1885 in Burma, not only political power changed hands, but also one economic system caved in to another. In fact, the novel succeeds in showing the economic underpinnings that led to the invasion of Burma. The child Rajkumar's incredulity—"A war over wood? Who's ever heard of such a thing?" (15)—may have been shared in part by Arjun and Dinu. However, the gaze of Ghosh's critique brings the capitalist mode of production into sharp focus and exposes the dark underbelly of colonialism's complicity with capitalism in which each fed and fattened the other.

Sea of Poppies is an equally scathing indictment of colonial economic policies that mainly concentrated on the cultivation of poppy plants as the sale of opium in international markets brought in rich dividends for the British merchants. The characteristic detail which marks Ghosh's representation of the well-oiled machinery of the teak trade is again visible in his depiction of the opium factory at Ghazipur.

With unerring precision, the whole process of manufacture of opium is described right from the procurement of poppy leaves to the packaging of balls of opium (90-99). The novel also very aptly captures the forced transformations in the agricultural practices of the native farmers of the Gangetic plains as a result of the growing demand of opium in the international market. This crucial transformation in the natural history of the region is presented evocatively in the passage where the protagonist Deeti wants to repair her hut:

The hut's roof was urgently in need of repairs, but in this age of flowers, thatch was not easy to come by: in the old days, the fields would be heavy with wheat in the winter, and after the spring harvest, the straw would be used to repair the damage of the year before. But now, with the sahibs forcing everyone to grow poppy, no one had thatch to spare—it had to be brought at the market, from people who lived in faraway villages, and the expense was such that people put off their repairs as long as they possibly could. (29)

Thus, a commodity which is available after every harvest for free is gradually turned into a marketable product available for a price. In the oeuvre of Ghosh, this surely must be one of the most perceptive instances that lay bare unambiguously the historical relation between colonialism and capitalism. *The Glass Palace* also records the manner in which European intervention and their trade practices transformed the natives' perception of their own ecology and their animals. Saya John explains this to Rajkumar:

(U)ntil 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 this logging camp. The entire way of life is their creation. (74)

This is a very forthright statement of the manner in which colonialist interventions disturbed the ways of life in colonized societies.

In a recent interview, Ghosh talks about the historical importance of the opium trade for British colonialism: “The Ghazipur and Patna opium factories between them

produced the wealth of Britain. It is astonishing to think of it but the Empire was really founded on opium” (Reddy 2008). Even the text contains a similar reference when the exterior of the factory is described just as Deeti is about to walk into the factory:

The fortifications here were formidable, and the guards particularly sharp-eyed—and well they might be, for the contents of those few sheds, or so it was said, were worth several million pounds sterling and could buy a good part of the City of London. (91)

It is understood that Ghosh is interested in the opium trade not simply in itself, but because it sustained and made possible the British Empire; it made lasting interventions in the ecology and natural history of a colonized region; and it engendered the dislocation and creation of communities. This also partly explains the long passages in *The Glass Palace* that focus on the logging and transportation of teak. Here, Ghosh is trying to track the flow of global capital from the colonial times onwards. According to Ghosh the basic processes and the fundamentals of globalization, that include large-scale transfer of capital and the transportation of labour, were initiated during European colonialism of the nineteenth century. Though globalization is sought to be identified today essentially as a late capitalist phenomenon commensurate with the postmodern condition and situation, Ghosh fleshes out its roots in colonialism and implicates globalization in the larger project of modernity. This is a part of the larger design where the representation of ‘contemporary’ conditions like diaspora, displacement, cultural crossings among others, is marked by Ghosh’s refusal to interpret them as an indicator of postmodernity *only*.

The figure of the ‘exile’ in modern literature has long since made way for the ‘migrant’ and the diasporic individual in postmodern literature. The almost large-scale migration of intellectuals from the third world to the first world since 1960s has ensured that diaspora continues to engage attention in the literatures, and the critiques of them, emanating from the third world. As a trope, diaspora is predicated upon the fact of travel that may or may not be accompanied by the violence of dislocation and displacement. In the Introduction to a recent volume on diaspora, the editors draw attention to the contemporary trend of migration: “Today, this migratory trend is

intricately connected to the multifaceted process called ‘globalisation’, which encompasses geographical, economic, political, technological and cultural dimensions” (Assayag and Benei 4). A similar spirit informs the understanding of theorists like Bhabha who tend to view it as a natural and essential aftermath of the postmodern and postcolonial condition. In Bhabha, the notion of the diasporic/dispersal is related with other terms and concepts like ‘hybridity’, ‘ambivalence’ and ‘mimicry’ to weave an intriguing and complex web of liminal cultural and national space where “America leads to Africa; the nations of Europe and Asia meet in Australia; the margins of the nation displace the centre; the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis” (“Narrating” 6). In a passage in one of his highly influential essays, Bhabha lyrically evokes the diasporic condition that betrays a romantic longing and fascination for a particular diasporic situation:

Gathering of exiles and emigrés and refugees; gathering on the edge of ‘foreign’ cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gatherings in the ghettos or cafés of city centres; gathering in the half-life, half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another’s language . . . gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present. (“Dissemination” 291)

This particular diasporic situation is exemplified by the figure of the cosmopolitan/metropolitan migrant (intellectual). In Bhabha’s theoretical framework and in Rushdie’s novels, this figure becomes the ultimate subject of a postcolonial and postmodern discourse. Rushdie, in fact, enjoys this “plural and partial, . . . ambiguous and shifting” ground and makes immense literary capital from it (*Imaginary* 15).

Bhabha’s notion of the diasporic condition, especially as articulated through the related concept of hybridity, has attracted sharp criticism from some quarters. The noted Marxist critic Aijaz Ahmad lambasts Bhabha for disregarding the material contours:

In this account, non-Europeans hardly ever encounter each other and never without a prior European modulation of the very field of that encounter. Nor do these celebrations of hybridity foreground the unequal relations of cultural power *today*; rather, intercultural

hybridity is presented as a transaction of displaced equals which somehow transcends the profound inequalities engendered by colonialism itself. (“Politics” 290, italics in original)

In his extremely astute critique, Ahmad draws our attention to the tendency to dehistoricize and abstractly romanticize contexts that stand out in Bhabha’s discursive (as well as Rushdie’s creative) practices. Ahmad connects this to the larger condition of postmodernism where cultures, stripped of “their historicity and density,” are reduced to marketable commodities (290). Ghosh’s own status as a diasporic writer belies his representation of diaspora/dispersal/dislocation in his novels.⁷¹ Far from being romantic and abstract, his representations of the diasporic condition are historically rooted, contextually grounded, and are remarkably free of the imperial binary logic that privileges Europe and the West. In a sense, they are commensurate with the qualified use of the magic realist technique in *The Circle of Reason* that self-consciously draws attention to magic realism’s propensity for eliding historical and material specificities (refer to section III of chapter 4). Ghosh’s handling of these issues is subtle, multi-layered and affectionate: while he does not deny colonialism’s role in the creation of diasporic individuals and communities, he certainly does not buy the argument that the diasporic condition is an essential outcome of postmodernity and/or postcoloniality. This is best illustrated through the vivid recreation of the medieval Indian Ocean trade in *In An Antique Land*. This ‘unarmed’ trading culture, where people from contiguous regions were engaged in a dialogue in an ambience of accommodation and compromise, predated European colonialism. Ghosh is rather critical of violent European interventions that not only resulted in the destruction of such non-hierarchical cultures, but at the same time replaced accommodation and compromise with violence and coercion (*In An Antique Land* 287-88). In *The Glass Palace* also, there is a reference to foreigners (merchants, boatmen, astrologers etc.) from many diverse regions living peacefully in Mandalay that is disturbed as a result of the British invasion (16). In a very subtle way, Ghosh suggests that while the diasporic condition before the onset of colonialism was not predicated upon the violence of forced dislocation, the diasporic upheaval resulting from colonialism is essentially predicated upon violence, more often than not state violence. This is clearly the case in *Sea of Poppies*. A substantially large group of characters, who comprise the motley crowd on the *Ibis*, are dislocated because of the

logic of the Empire, not out of volition. At any rate, the recreation of a transnational and transcultural group, the members of which consider each other as 'jahaj bhais', is underwritten by the possibility of globalizing processes in the space and time of colonialism. Through the representations discussed above, Ghosh can be seen to be offering a radical rereading of the category of globalization and making an important intervention into the current debates on globalization. Let us now concentrate on the creation of diaspora and diasporic identities in *The Glass Palace*.

This novel has an intriguing play on diaspora, displacement and dislocation. This is best summed up in the situation of the four Princesses:

So it happened that of the four Princesses, the two who'd been born in Burma both chose to live on in India. Their younger sisters, on the other hand, both born in India, chose to settle in Burma: both married and had children. (213)

This pattern is repeated with Rajkumar, Dolly and Saya John. Rajkumar is born in India but is comfortable in Burma; Dolly, born in Burma, feels at home in Ratnagiri; Saya John, Chinese, makes his money in Burma and finally settles in Malaya. Rajkumar, an adept in the art of survival, is the classic diasporic and transnational figure who meets a crucial requirement of Ghosh's fiction: the ability to cross boundaries and the capacity to perceive, and thereby accommodate, difference. Other characters also share this feature: while Arjun and Uma relish Nyonya food (364-65), Calcutta and Rangoon are brought together through the nuptial knot between Neel and Manju. In a very rare and uncharacteristic passage, Rajkumar ruminates on movements and displacements that capture Ghosh's perception of the diasporic condition:

But if there's one thing I've learnt in my life, Dolly, it is that there is no certainty about these things. . . . There are people who have the luck to end their lives where they began them. But this is not something that is owed to us. On the contrary, we have to expect that a time will come when we'll have to move on again. (310)

In the Long March, they do finally move as they join millions of Indians who fled Burma into India. Diasporic movements in *The Glass Palace* (this is also true of Ghosh's novels in general) function as constitutive elements of identity, and it

reminds us of the imagined gesture of stepping through a looking glass in Ghosh's second novel *The Shadow Lines* which functions as a critical indicator of a character's openness to experience.

The geographical space over which the action of *The Glass Palace* plays itself out is essentially a vast transnational space. It is a liminal and borderless space that allows Rajkumar's passage from Bengal to Burma and Saya John's easy travels across contiguous regions. Later, this borderless region became a part of the vast British Empire. Through scattered characters and communities and the complex matrix of relationships thereof, Southeast Asia and India are presented as a contiguous region of vast liminal space that is at once borderless and transnational, where cultures, traditions and nationalities flow into one another. Regional identities are not forged through an oppositional matrix by setting off the self against the other but through an extension of the self into the other. When Jaya's entry into contemporary Burma is set off against her grandfather Rajkumar's entry into the same region a century ago, *The Glass Palace* becomes symptomatic of the violence of colonialism and the logic of larger historical forces that transformed contiguous geographical space into reified national space with clearly demarcated borders. Present day Burma/Myanmar, ruled by a military Junta, is one of the most closed countries and Jaya has a taste of it in the form of the relentless surveillance to which she is subjected.

The uprooting of communities at macro level parallels these micro-level dislocations of individuals and families. To satisfy the demands of exploitation under the colonial regime, labour from South India is taken to work in the timber yards and oil fields of Burma and the rubber plantations in Malaysia. The creation of a diaspora through forced displacement of communities accompanied by violence results in friction, and the fallouts of such encounters is witnessed at first hand by Uma and Dolly in a gruesome scene of riots against Indians (244). To assume that the friction between the native Burmese and the diasporic Indians sprang suddenly because of the British occupation would be a gross travesty of the history that this novel represents. The easy currency of the expression 'kalaa' and the imminent danger to Rajkumar when the British/Indian soldiers march into Mandalay certainly suggest an undercurrent of animosity. However, left to themselves, the communities could have

managed with existing differences just as the communities involved in the medieval Indian Ocean trade had in *In An Antique Land*. The entry of the British with an aim to exploit the natural resources of Burma complicates matters at two levels: the colonial Army was composed predominantly of kalaas and the economic exploitation created a powerful class of Burmese Indians like Rajkumar who were very ardent supporters of the colonial regime. The Second World War adds a new and unexpected twist where Indian soldiers are used by the colonial regime to fight a war in the colonies that is actually a war at home fought between two European powers to establish supremacy. Ghosh's narrative holds colonialism and its logic squarely responsible for the situation.

We must pause here and look at different perspectives because "Ghosh is much too serious and responsible a writer to take easy potshots at what he regards as the source of much Asian evil" (Iyer 30). Ghosh offers a very nuanced and multi-layered understanding of the 'source' (unmistakably British colonialism) through a set of four characters: Rajkumar, Uma, Arjun and Beni Prasad Dey, Uma's husband and the native District Collector of Ratnagiri. Rajkumar's character has more shades of grey than is evident from the discussion above. Diasporic and a transnational, Rajkumar is industrious, hard working and constant. The ready indicators of his ability to cross boundaries and the capacity to perceive and thereby accommodate difference are his acquaintances—Saya John and his family, Doh Say, U Ba Kyaw; his wife Dolly; and the fact that he had given two names each for his sons, one Indian and the other Burmese. However, these positive qualities are undercut by some others that contradict these. Accused of being "no better than a slaver and a rapist" by Uma (248), he surprisingly happens to be the most exploitative character in the novel who transports poor labour from India to Burma creating in the process large diasporic populations; uses the war to make huge profits; and sexually exploits a female worker in the rubber plantations at Morningside. His eagerness to act as a willing tool of colonial capitalism is a defining component of his identity and Ghosh uses it to build up a critique of colonialism that is not articulated through a colonizer, but through a colonized subject. This effectively collapses the boundary that exists between the two terms of the colonial binary—colonizer/colonized, European/native etc. From the point of view of the present study, this collapsing of the terms within a colonial binary

can be interpreted as collapsing the boundary that exists between the self and its other. In other words, one is implicated in the other. Colonialism becomes an overarching process that can continue without the original players—the European masters. The situation sketched through Rajkumar is similar to Gandhi's formulation of the "English rule without the Englishman" in his *Hind Swaraj*.⁷²

If Rajkumar occupies one end of the spectrum, Uma Dey occupies the other. Widow of a civil servant, she is drawn into the nationalistic fold through a grand European Tour which also includes a stopover at New York, on the other side of the Atlantic. Her nasty spat with Rajkumar (247-48), her arguments with Matthew where she refers to "the American South before the Civil War, of Uncle Tom's Cabin" (231), and her attempts at alerting her compatriots to the situation in Burma (253) make her colonialism's most vocal critic within Ghosh's text. The "first truly modern individual in Ghosh's narrative" according to Pankaj Mishra (7), Uma is contrasted with Rajkumar and with her nephew Arjun who thinks that "we're the first modern Indians; the first Indians to be truly free" (279). Uma has been strategically used by Ghosh to articulate a poetics of resistance, a poetics that touches upon not only the dominant mode of anticolonial resistance in the form of Gandhi's non-violent principles, but also other forms of resistance such as the Indian Independence League and the *Ghadar* Party. Equally crucially, her resistance is articulated from hitherto lesser-known sites like Southeast Asia and New York. Her resistance, in a grand sweep, maps temporal, geographical and ideological spaces in the critique of colonialism.

The case of Second Lieutenant Arjun Roy, who can be said to occupy an interstitial space midway between Rajkumar and Uma, has been handled with a degree of sophistication that is otherwise missing in the novel. Flushed with initial excitement by "looking at the battalion's battle honours" (262), Arjun is gradually initiated into the complexities that keep the machinery of the colonial Army well oiled. He is puzzled when he learns that natives in the Army do not use umbrellas because "umbrellas were a sign of sovereignty" (285) and he feels the foundational matrix of his identity gradually weakening under the pressure of his friend, Hardy's pointed questions:

‘Well, didn’t you ever think: 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 . . . 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?’ (330)

Even Arjun is aware that “the chaps who’re trained in England get paid a lot more than we do” (284). It hardly needs any effort to deduce that the ground situation for Arjun was not what he had painted for himself. Just as he had faith in the fairness and decency of his British boss, ‘Bucky’ Buckland, he also has faith in the British imperial system, the army being one of its strongest and most efficient arms.

As a typical colonial subject that one comes across in Indian Writing in English, Arjun has competition from another colonial subject in the guise of Beni Prasad Dey, the Cambridge-educated District Collector of Ratnagiri. Every inch a modern, he considered the defense of the British Empire as much a part of his duty as dealing with the Burmese royal family in exile. Perhaps, in the whole range of Ghosh’s fiction, there is no other character who is more immersed in the grand narratives of European modernity. To him, the Burmese royalty in exile were unfit for perceiving higher and finer sentiments like love as they had never appreciated anything aesthetic or artistic like a beautiful painting (152). While marrying, he had risked the consent of his family because he “needed a girl who would be willing to step out into society; someone young, who wouldn’t be resistant to learning modern ways” (158). On the first night of his marriage, he tells his young bride about “Cambridge, about the cobbled streets and stone bridges, about concerts he’d attended” (159).⁷³ When it becomes evident that his marriage with Uma has reached a dead end, he speculates on his idea of an ideal marriage:

‘I used to dream about the kind of marriage I wanted. . . . 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.’ (172-73)

Is this then another instance of a transition narrative that has remained grievously incomplete? Dey surely reminds us of Ila of *The Shadow Lines*, another character

immersed in the narrative of modernity and who like Dey believes that history could happen only in Europe. Dey's conclusion that his ideal marriage cannot be realized in India runs dangerously close to the end of *A Passage to India* that negates the possibility of friendship between a native and a British in India.

Both Arjun and Beni Prasad Dey present us with instances of what Bhabha calls 'mimic men'. Their declared and internalized modernity is an indicator of the extent to which the Empire shaped the identities of educated middle-class Indians that Macaulay had dreamed of creating—"a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect." Macaulay's dream seems to have fictionally materialized in these two characters and Arjun acknowledges as much to his friend Hardy:

'What are we? We've learnt to dance the tango and we know how to eat roast beef with a knife and fork. The truth is that except for the colour of our skin, most people in India wouldn't even recognise us as Indians. When we joined up we didn't have India on our minds: we wanted to be sahibs and that's what we've become.' (439)

The construction of their personalities seems to be the "effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English" (Bhabha, *Location* 87). The question of race plays a defining role in the construction of their identities. In his long e-mail correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ghosh underlines the importance of race in the construction of colonial categories and even goes to the extent of proclaiming that "Race was much more than just a tool of Empire: it was (in the Kantian sense) one of the foundational categories of thought that made other perceptions possible" (149). Whether it is Saya John who is berated as "Johnny Chinaman" (72), or the Collector's transfer, or the incident of Hardy being called a "stinking Nigger" by a British sergeant (339), or the natives not being allowed on the train at Butterworth, race is a significant issue in *The Glass Palace*. Arjun is gradually made to realize the force of this reality through a series of questions and incidents that essentially strike at the foundational matrix of his identity. For Dey, his transfer to Bombay from Ratnagiri makes him realize that while the English "are tolerant in many things, . . . (t)hey like to keep their races tidily separate" (173). Both internalize a historical tendency displayed by Indian officers of

the colonial army whereby the question of race was elided in favour of an all-encompassing modern identity. This is a contention that Ghosh makes in his correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty (153), and this insight has been employed to read the construction of Ila's personality in *The Shadow Lines* (refer to section II of chapter 3).

Drawing on Bhabha's theoretical formulations on identity in the seminal essay, "Of Mimicry and Man," Anshuman Mondal analyzes these two characters as cases of mimicry and colonial hybridity in his book on Ghosh. Mondal contends that the choices made by Arjun and Dey do not result from "a positive affirmation of an alternative identity," but rather because their colonial hybrid identities "have been shown to be nothing more than an illusion" (Amitav 122). For Mondal, their hybrid identities are not stable:

The colonial hybrid identity is not a comfortable resolution of disparate influences but an uneasy, anxious and fragile space of accommodation that enables one to construct a place for oneself in the colonial scheme of things, but at the same time threatens to dismantle that scheme and one's place in it. (121)

The construction of their identities through 'performance' (mimicry) cannot conceal their prior identities thereby forming a threat to the colonial discourse structured on binaries. While these two characters fit Bhabha's theoretical formulation of colonial hybridity, Mondal opines that the construction of characters like Rajkumar "unsettles the very notion of identity as theorized by thinkers such as Bhabha and Butler" (116). To substantiate his point, Mondal looks at the strategic employment of dress/cloth (European as well as indigenous) by Rajkumar and Saya John. While European clothes and European manners for both are unfailing guarantees of success in the colonialist paradigm, they are ill-fitting and always carry an "atmosphere of constrained enactment."⁷⁴ These two characters do not completely internalize the narrative of European modernity precisely because beneath the veneer of their hybrid identities, there is a stable identity that is reflected in their native clothes. Both realize that their colonial hybrid identities function as a mask, an illusion and a deception that they have to put up with for material success in the colonial paradigm.

Arjun's character merits considerations that need to go beyond the paradigms of colonial hybridity and mimicry. It is known that Ghosh draws upon his own biographical resources in the writing of this novel: his uncle in Rangoon, a teak merchant, was nicknamed 'The Prince', and his father was an officer in General Slim's Fourteenth Army which recaptured Burma from the Japanese in 1945. In the "Author's Notes" to the novel, Ghosh writes that his father "was thus among those 'loyal' Indians who found themselves across the lines from the 'traitors' of the Indian National Army" (551). Arjun embodies this historical dilemma and predicament of the Indian soldiers that acted as a catalyst in the formation of the Indian National Army in Southeast Asia during the Second World War. It is a peculiar predicament of a colonial/postcolonial subject that historically manifested in the Indian soldiers' divided loyalty: whether to remain 'loyal' and serve the British who had enslaved their country or to switch sides and join the Japanese with the knowledge that the gesture amounted to "exchanging the British for the Japanese" (438). Arjun shares his name with the legendary epic hero of *The Mahabharata*, and the obvious play on names extends this hitherto historical-temporal-spatial predicament to cover the timeless question of moral and ethical choices before a hero. Arjun's predicament in the battlefield at Jitra echoes and is modeled on his namesake's dilemma before the epic battle at Kurukshetra.⁷⁵ Arjun's identity is thus an extremely nuanced construct of equally complex situations. The foregoing discussion on diaspora, transnational space, national borders and construction of identities posits *The Glass Palace* as "the most scathing critique of British colonialism."⁷⁶

III

The "most complete utterance that a human being is capable of," the novel form for Ghosh "synthesizes all kinds of expression" (Kumar 103). In a famous essay "The March of the Novel through History: The Testimony of my Grandfather's Bookcase," Ghosh dwells on the development of the novel form and the ways in which it is different from other "traditions of fiction that predate the novel" (*Imam* 295). Ghosh locates the difference in the manner in which setting and location are evoked in both the traditions. While setting is a defining element of the novel, for the traditions that predate the novel "the details that constitute the setting are profoundly

unimportant, incidental almost” (296). According to Ghosh, the essential element in those traditions is the story itself: “What held them together and gave them their appeal was not where they happened but how—the narrative, in other words” (296). While Ghosh’s novels betray remarkable ability to experiment with narrative strategy and the novelistic form, *The Glass Palace* goes back to traditional Victorian realism. Ghosh’s choice of the realistic narrative mode occasions surprise because his work has been viewed as revisionist and subversive. Postcolonial critiques of realism as a narrative mode implicate realism in colonial discourse that is predicated upon the assumed transparency of the truth of narrative representation. Said’s reading of Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, which has been discussed in section VI of chapter 2, is a representative instance of such a critique. Even as poststructuralism uncovered this truth and revealed the hidden underbelly of realism, novelists from the Third World increasingly found magic realism a more suitable mode to articulate their utterances in the postcolonial novel. It is indeed surprising that Ghosh chose the realist garb to clothe his most ambitious venture that is a scathing critique of imperialism: “It’s as if a revisionist wolf were dressed in imperial clothing” (Iyer 28). Let us examine the implications that follow Ghosh’s choice of form and technique which shapes the narrative aesthetic of the novel.

Structurally the novel is true to the spirit of realism, despite its ambitious scope. The beginning and the end share commonalities that hold together the intervening narrative: the novel begins with the Glass Palace of the Burmese royalty and ends with Dinu’s photo studio which has the same name. While it opens at a moment of great historical and social ferment, it closes on similar lines documenting the efforts of a single person to bring about change in contemporary Burma. Soldiers, uniformed or otherwise, unmistakably mark their presence on both the occasions; and both seem to centre on a woman each trying to articulate her resistance and defiance. Moreover, they are connected through a familial link: the beginning unfolds before Rajkumar’s eyes while the end is narrated through his son Dinu and his granddaughter, Jaya. Rajkumar’s family, in fact, plays a central structural role in this grand family drama. While the Indian connection is introduced through Dolly’s friendship with Uma and later advanced through Neel’s marriage to Manju, the Malaysian connection is introduced through Rajkumar’s friendship with Saya John

and carried forward through Dinu's romance with Alison. It is a feature of the narrative that the connections are made through characters placed at strategic locations. The discourses on nationalism and the Indian freedom movement are incorporated into the narrative through Uma who is in London and the USA precisely at those moments when historically these formations were taking shape. Again, she is the one who articulates Indian nationalism through the Indian Independence League in Southeast Asia, and witnesses the flaring up of Burmese nationalism through the unfolding of a gruesome scene of riot against Indians in Rangoon. Her nephew Arjun is inserted into the formation, the ideology and the development of the Indian National Army as an articulation of resistance to the Raj.

The narration uses the characters and their situatedness to plot the larger picture on which the novel's principal thrust lies. It is deeply concerned about the shifting and interrelated forms of dominance and resistance and the mobilization of collectivities. But the complex question of how subjectivities are experienced is fundamental to the novelist's art. This becomes doubly important in a realistic novel where a changing cultural world under the effect of the juggernaut of colonial power is represented. And this question 'What happens to the lives of the characters once the larger picture is installed?' does not find an answering spark of interest in Ghosh.

This is not Ghosh's first brush with realism. While in his first novel there are elements of social realism, in *The Shadow Lines* he uses an ostensibly realistic strain. However, the realism in *The Shadow Lines* is given a subtle twist as linearity, so essential a feature of any realistic narrative, is deliberately and consistently broken. In *The Glass Palace*, the narration religiously sticks to linearity. There is only a single time-frame along which the narrative of the novel develops linearly. While it is true that there are multiple spatial locations between which the narrative shuttles, the action across all these locations unfolds along one temporal plane. Among Ghosh's other novels, only *Sea of Poppies* has a solitary time-frame; all others have multiple time zones from which the several narratives of the novels unravel. Some, like *The Calcutta Chromosome* and *The Hungry Tide*, have double helix structures where two narratives develop simultaneously in the time of narration. Readers of Ghosh's fiction accustomed to the shuttling and rambling nature of narratives may find the movement

and plot of *The Glass Palace* somewhat monotonous. The linearity that attends the unraveling of the narrative is not only strict and uncompromising, it is almost absolute. While this linearity must be one of the chief reasons for the monotony of the novel, it is also occasioned because of some other features of the narrative. In *The Glass Palace*, information on cars, aeroplanes, anthrax, elephants, Nyonya cooking etc. is piled up in a manner that it may be construed as a historical narrative's attempt at precision and verisimilitude. Among other details, this attempt also includes mention of Huntley and Palmer's biscuit tin in which Manju keeps Arjun's letters (259) and Woodward's Gripe Water which she administers to her colicky baby (391). Rohini Mokashi-Punekar has aptly observed that unlike the details of streets of London in *The Shadow Lines*, "these nuggets of information remain undigested within the plot" and never extend themselves "from the minds of the characters" to "become an inseparable part of the novel" (56). In chapter 3, such specificity and precision has been discussed as a characteristic feature of the narrative of *The Shadow Lines*. In that novel, it forms part of a larger design whereby an ostensible realism is set off against a sort of subversive realism. In the present instance, the search for a hidden design or agenda may prove useless and unrewarding. On one hand, these details may be taken as a testimony of Ghosh's sensitivity to historical details and on the other they may be interpreted as an instance when the anthropologist in Ghosh gets the better of the story-teller and the novelist. However, not all recondite historical information that the narrative records suffers from a similar fate: the use of the camera by Mrs Khambatta (169-70) and the introduction of a new style of wearing the sari (104-05) have been definitely integrated into the plot. The photograph taken by Mrs. Khambatta serves not only as an important link in the family history that Jaya recounts, but also forms a crucial part of the trope of photography that runs through the whole novel and that largely influences Ghosh's description of important events. The first reference (in the narrative) to the sari worn in a new style by Uma may be read, by connecting it with the larger motif of dress in the novel, as "an important signifier of Indian 'national' identity and a potent symbol in the struggle against the Raj" (Mondal, *Amitav* 118).

We may now return to the question of the portrayal of individual lives in Ghosh's narrative, especially when the portrayal occurs with the portrayal of the larger historical forces. The narrative of *The Glass Palace* suffers from a "relentless

lack of interiority” (Mokashi-Punekar 56) where “both king and peasant alike” “lack a complex inner life” (Mishra 7). The narrative is marked throughout by a characteristic ‘rushing through’ as it refuses to dwell on and develop any potential situation. In fact, rushing through with rapidity happens over and over again once the Burmese resistance is swept aside in only fourteen days: Dolly and Uma befriend each other in what seemed like an impossibly short time, Rajkumar and Dolly are paired off with an abruptness that attends the strangely coincidental marriage of Neel and Manju. Even the last scene where Manju’s young son finds Rajkumar and Uma locked in an embrace “feels equally rushed in dramatizing the overused idea of sexual love as redemption from history” (Mishra 7).⁷⁷ There is another detail that is generally overlooked, but it too falls in pat with the argument here: abruptly, in the last paragraph of the novel, we are told that the narrator of the novel is an unnamed one (547). Then there are lines like the following which can convey tersely the passage of a substantial span of time: “Soon after this, Dolly learnt that she was pregnant again” (194). Suddenly, in the middle of the narrative, we are told that Dolly “missed her sketchbook” (196). This sort of abruptness is a hallmark of the narrative that also refuses to look inside or pause on emotions and develop a potentially rewarding emotional situation. After the birth of their second son, Rajkumar receives a letter from Saya John inviting them to visit Malaya. Rajkumar shows Dolly the letter and requests her to make the visit. The reader has earlier been told that Dolly is leading a cocoon-like existence for sometime, refusing to undertake any journey. Readers’ expectations are belied as nothing dramatic or emotional comes out of it:

Rajkumar showed Dolly Saya John’s letter, with the comment: ‘If you’re ever going to go there then this is the time.’ After she’d read the letter Dolly agreed: ‘All right; let us go.’ (196)

The plot moves on similar lines when Dolly, in Ratnagiri, turns down Rajkumar’s offer of marriage and asks him to leave Ratnagiri: “‘I can see no reason to refuse.’ Without another word, he turned and walked away, into the shadows of the bearded peepul” (165). The case of Rajkumar’s illegal child Ilongo is even more striking. Potentially an explosive situation that has the power to unsettle individuals and families, it is disposed off with a simplicity and naiveté that is at the least baffling. Even the blooming relationship between Dolly and Sawant is disposed off summarily by pairing off Sawant with the first Princess. Like the advancing Japanese troops

during their initial forays into Southeast Asia, the narrative marches on without bothering to go into the finer details of the lives of characters it portrays.

The transformations and vicissitudes that the narrative recounts are touched upon only externally. Rajkumar's meteoric rise to the position of a business magnate and Uma's transformation from a shy and diffident wife of a Collector to a front-ranking leader of the freedom movement, and thereafter a close associate of the Mahatma are not accorded the required space that these changes merit. In other words, these transformations are not sufficiently interiorized so that they become constitutive elements of the character's personality. They remain external as they do not impact the psyche of the individual character. Finally, Ghosh takes recourse to coincidences to tie up the loose ends. There are coincidences like the stationing of Arjun's unit in Malaysia that abuts on Morningside Plantations; Dolly's journey to Georgetown by the steamer *Nuwara Eliya*, "the same vessel that had brought her to Rangoon immediately after her marriage" (216); Manju coming across Neel, the film producer (!), in a film studio in Calcutta; and Arjun, defeated and spent, coming face to face with, of all the characters, Dinu, his rival in love. Rukmini Bhaya Nair comments that Ghosh "isn't altogether able to resist the temptation to play God" (169), and expresses incredulity at the constant appearance of this "irresistible old trickster of fiction" (170). She ends up patting Ghosh's back for his skill in endearing "his characters to his audience that they are prepared to 'forget history' from time to time and allow the internal dynamics of the text to dominate events" (170). It is difficult however to agree with Nair. In the uneasy balance between "history writ large" and "history writ little," to borrow a precise phrase from one of Ghosh's contemporaries,⁷⁸ it is true that the anthropologist in Ghosh, at some critical moments in *The Glass Palace*, overcomes the novelist. The narrative sacrifices the individual lives of the characters in its preoccupation with representing the unfolding of larger historical forces.

The strain of realism introduced in *The Glass Palace* is used by Ghosh for the two novels that come after, *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*. While *The Hungry Tide* will be dealt with in the next chapter, let us very briefly discuss the use of realism in *Sea of Poppies* by way of comparison with *The Glass Palace* as both

happen to be historical narratives. Intriguingly, *Sea of Poppies* begins in a magic realist fashion as Deeti has a “vision of a tall-masted ship, at sail on the ocean” that she has never materially seen before, “not even in a dream” (3). Her circumstances and her geographical location (situated far away from the sea) suggest that Deeti’s vision is out of the real, or magically real if you will. This mode of narration is employed again briefly later in the narrative when Paulette narrates a very unusual incident to Zachary Reid, a ‘mulatto’ and the second mate of the *Ibis* (297-304). After *The Circle of Reason*, this may be said to be Ghosh’s first brush with magic realism. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the depiction of syncretic religious practices in *The Hungry Tide* also borders on magical realism. A pattern can be traced across Ghosh’s work as regards the use of this technique: the mode of narration in texts which have sizeable presence of subaltern characters uses magic realism, or a technique that is similar to it. However, as has already been mentioned in the discussion of its use in the chapter on *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh hardly ever employs fully developed magic realism. In *Sea of Poppies*, it remains marginal as the dominant narrative technique is realism. The narrative gaze is indeed unsparing as it zooms in on closely at the harsh lived experience of the characters. While this is true for most of the characters, the representation of the travails of Kalua and Neel stand out in this regard. This unsparing feature is especially noticeable at three places: Kalua’s mistreatment at the hands of the three landlords (565-59); the inhuman flogging of Kalua on board the *Ibis* (486-89); and Neel’s travails with his cellmate in prison (321-27). The attempt to represent and record faithfully the experiences of characters is complimented by a concomitant attempt at recreating the historical ambience of nineteenth-century India.

Precision aimed at verisimilitude, which is a feature of the narrative of *The Glass Palace*, is also present in *Sea of Poppies*. James Buchan, reviewing the novel in *The Guardian*, comments on the encyclopedic breadth of Ghosh’s novel:

At a more everyday level, Ghosh creates an encyclopedia of early 19th-century Indian food, servants, furniture, religious worship, nautical commands, male and female costume and underlinen, trades, marriage and funeral rites, botany and horticulture, opium cultivation, alcoholic drinks, grades of clerk and non-commissioned military

officers, criminal justice, sexual practices, traditional medicines and sails and rigging. (<http://theasylum.wordpress.com>)

As far as the evocation of sights, sounds and customs of a bygone era is concerned, Ghosh's novel can justifiably rank along with historical narratives of masters like Walter Scott. There is a conscious and drawn out attempt at recreating the pidgin language that, according to Ghosh, was widespread across ships sailing on the Indian Ocean. Peter Parker, reviewing the novel in *The Sunday Times*, comments that Ghosh

has ransacked not only Hobson-Jobson, . . . but also a more obscure 1811 English and Hindostanee Naval Dictionary of Technical Terms and Sea Phrases. The result is a glorious babel of a novel in which people speak everything from pidgin and Bhojpuri to the comically mangled English of a Bengali babu and a young Frenchwoman." (<http://entertainment.timesonline>)

It should be added here that at times, the languages used by Ghosh's characters become trying, and their incomprehensibility threatens to disturb the flow of the narrative. When this is pointed out in an interview that appeared in *Outlook* (26 May 2008) Ghosh defends his language by saying that "English people when they were living in India were certainly not speaking like Jane Austen or George Eliot" (Reddy). The strong pull exerted by the anthropologist over the novelist in Ghosh is very clearly discernible here.

As a historical novel, *Sea of Poppies* is also interested in the larger historical forces, but it does not sacrifice the human interest for tracking the historical transformations. The details of descriptions and the nuggets of information are made integral parts of the narrative here. For instance, the description of the opium factory and the process of manufacture of opium, which actually comes straight out of the diary of a Scotsman (Reddy), are presented in the narrative through the awe-struck vision of Deeti as she marvels at the proportions of the establishment. This is pure anthropological and historical data, but it is accommodated and internalized in the narrative through the experience of a character. This is a defining feature of Ghosh's narration, not simply typical of *Sea of Poppies*. Except at some points in *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh consistently displays this quality of incorporating anthropological data focalized through the lens of the novelist and the storyteller. In *Sea of Poppies*, there

is visible interest in the details of the lived lives of the characters, and the narrative fashions a critique of colonialism and the opium trade by recording closely the experiences of the characters and the violent dislocations brought about as a result of these processes. The interest is generated and sustained by the characters, their internal dynamics thereof, and the human drama involving love, exploitation and treachery that unfolds on the *Ibis*. The conclusion of the first part of the trilogy leaves the reader with a sense of eager anticipation as to how the human drama will finally unfold.

IV

The Glass Palace has been hailed as an epic that is formal in tone and procedure. In its temporal and spatial sweep, the novel may well rank alongside Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. In fact, Ghosh's novel sweeps across many historical events and territories in a span that exceeds more than a century. It records the historical ways by which vast and liminal transnational space gets ossified and crystallized as national borders. Ghosh's use of the realistic technique has been tempered to a large extent by the introduction of the epic frame. The important point is that the exigencies of this frame have, to a large extent, moulded the narrative aesthetic of *The Glass Palace*. Some of the ways in which it is manifested, especially with regard to the use of realism, have been discussed in the foregoing section. This section will mainly concentrate on the narrative voice and its location in the narrative.

Let us begin by asking what is it precisely that *The Glass Palace*, as a historical novel, is interested in? There are historical personalities like King Thebaw and Queen Supalayay, and they are indispensable part of the narrative. Yet, the details of their lives lived in Mandalay and in Ratnagiri are not significant in the overall scheme of the novel. Though Supalayay has been beautifully conceived and presented, she and her husband do not come across as individuals. They seem to function as backdrop to the unfolding of grand historical processes. The dissolution of the Burmese kingdom and the establishment of a new economic and political order with its own exploitative structures is one of those grand historical forces. The capitalist mode of production that imperialism brought in its wake introduced the region to one facet of modernity. The other facet of modernity in the region, nation-states with

clearly demarcated boundaries, also arose because of the impact of imperialism. These grand historical forces also unfold through the individual acts of some characters. For instance, Rajkumar's act of transporting labour from South India into Burma never becomes a constitutive element of his personality and psyche. It always remains external to his identification as an individual. In a way, it functions in the narrative as a microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic dislocation, forced or otherwise, of people ingrained in the ideology and practices of colonialism. What the novel presents, through Rajkumar's exploitative character, is then a representation of the historical process of dislocation and the creation of diasporic communities with which the history of colonialism is fraught. Such a representation essentially follows from Ghosh's choice of the epic mode. Stately and formal, the novel privileges the representation of larger historical forces.

The narrative voice is a good indicator of the extent to which realism as the principle narrative mode has been influenced by the epic mode. Its location vis-à-vis the action and the characters it narrates and portrays is significant: distant, detached and authoritative, it works like a panning camera that is manifestly omniscient and omnipresent. It gives an impression of being far removed, in a sense detached from the scene of action. In true epic fashion, the narrative voice maintains a measured distance, sometimes grand and always neutral, almost disinterested. It is in total control and complete command of the narrative, and everything in the narrative is at its beck and call. Again, Rajkumar may be cited as an example. Initiated into the narrative as a potential 'coloured counterpart' of Kipling's Kim, the readers feel let down as the narrative voice shies away from a close engagement with the character. In the whole of the more than five hundred pages of this novel, only one small paragraph is devoted to what, in the traditional parlance, would be called as psychological delineation of character. There is no attempt to sufficiently interiorize this character, who would be the ideal protagonist of classic rags to riches story. The point is that Rajkumar does not exist in the narrative as an independent subject voice, he is introduced as the object of the narrative voice. This happens with almost all the characters, with perhaps the exception of Arjun. All the characters and the perspectives that each stand for are made subservient to the narrative voice. Moreover, the narrative voice does not function as an independent subject voice that

competes with the authorial voice. In *The Glass Palace*, the narrative voice and the authorial voice collapse into each other. Every worldview accommodated in the novel is the object of direct authorial/narratorial discourse. If there is any lingering doubt that the narratorial voice may not be the authorial, the feeling is dispelled when the narratorial voice, focalized through Jaya, finds Syu Kyi “beautiful almost beyond belief” (541) and discovers that “it was impossible to behold this woman and not be half in love” (542).⁷⁹ This conflation of the narrative voice and the authorial voice on the one hand, and the submission of all other voices in the text to the authoritative voice on the other, marks Ghosh’s novel as univocal. Viewed from a Bakhtinian perspective, the narrative of *The Glass Palace* is ‘monologic’ rather than ‘dialogic’.

Sea of Poppies offers a contrast of sorts. It is true that this novel also records the historical processes of dislocation and migration that created Indian diasporas abroad. Yet the novel seems to present these dislocations as constitutive features of the personality of the characters. Deeti’s decision to sign up and board the *Ibis* as indentured labour does not function only as a representative instance, it is sufficiently interiorized so that it becomes a constitutive element of her personality. Other characters have also been sufficiently interiorized as individuals in their own right, and they do not exist in the narrative as the objects of the authorial discourse. Here, there seems to be no conflation between the authorial voice and the narrative voice. Rather, they are independent subject voices who are accommodated in the narrative along with their different worldviews. Like the lascari tongue that Ghosh recreates in *Sea of Poppies*, the characters here exhibit remarkable variety. This novel can be said to be truly dialogic and ‘polyphonic’.

Both the novels are historical narratives and they meet most of the requirements of the genre. But as the discussion in the foregoing sections amply suggest, both are very different. This is actually a testimony to the sheer versatility of Ghosh that manifests itself again through his willingness to experiment with form and narrative technique. What he does, in effect, is creatively broaden the genre of the historical novel. There is a possibility that the discussion of these two novels in this chapter may be construed as a positive affirmation of *Sea of Poppies* and a negative appraisal of *The Glass Palace*. This may be due especially to the former’s

characterization as polyphonic and the latter's as monologic. Selden et al remark that "(t)here is a tendency among recent critics to treat polyphonic and kinds of 'plural' text as normative rather than as eccentric; that is, they treat them as more truly literary than more univocal (monologic) kinds of writing" (52). In a way, this falls in pat with Barthes's notion of readerly text and the questioning of master narratives. The radical questioning of hegemonic and authoritative discourses of modernity in postmodernism and poststructuralism was accompanied by the privileging of plurality and multiplicity at the cost of one dominant point of view. For bringing into the picture other modes of doing and thinking, this was a necessary strategy, almost an inevitable one. However, this in no way means that a plural text has more literary value than a text that is perceived to be univocal. Moreover, there is a possibility that such a consistent privileging of plurality may itself turn into a sort of hegemonistic discourse.

The Glass Palace has been enthusiastically received all over the world, not only in those regions that it depicts, but also in other regions like Germany where it won an important award. One of the chief reasons for the novel's favourable reception is that it breaks the centrist hold on history, especially the history of a region that was once a very important, but now an almost forgotten, theatre of the Second World War. The history and the historical perspective that Ghosh represents may be said to have been focalized through the margin and the periphery. *The Glass Palace* introduces other points of view and other perspectives on the history of a neglected region. Therefore, while Ghosh's novel may be monologic from strictly aesthetic (poetics) considerations, politically, however, it moves away from the monologic overtones of grand and centrist discourses. Shall we say that Ghosh's historical novel, in recuperating and accommodating resistant and subversive historical voices, is a politically dialogic novel? In these highly surcharged postcolonial times, an attempt at striking a balance between poetics and politics is perilous, to say the least. Ghosh must be commended for seriously attempting it and almost achieving that elusive balance between poetics and politics.

Chapter 6

Ecological Narrative

In his essay “The March of the Novel through History,” Ghosh finds that the novel form has a paradoxical beginning: “vigorously international from the start,” the novel “is founded upon a myth of parochiality, in the exact sense of a parish—a place named and charted, a definite location.” He goes on to add:

A novel, in other words, must always be set somewhere: it must have its setting, and within the evolution of the narrative this setting must, classically, play a part almost as important as those of the characters themselves. (*Imam* 294)

Citing examples of Mrs. Gaskell’s *Cranford* and Joyce’s *Dublin*, he opines that it is nearly impossible to imagine a novel without a place, a setting, a location. As a novelist, Ghosh exhibits a remarkable ability to evoke place and location. Ghosh uses his gift to telling effect in depicting pre-colonial Ratnagiri in *The Glass Palace*, the expatriate settlements in al-Ghazira in *The Circle of Reason*, and the ghostly Renupur station in *The Calcutta Chromosome*. In *The Shadow Lines* concrete place takes on the contours of somewhat abstracted space as the narrative alternates between lived place and imagined space. Through broad strokes and subtle nuances, Ghosh demonstrates an enviable ability to conjure up locations, even those which have been either less represented or hitherto neglected.

Nowhere is his creative urge to bring to life places and locations more apparent than in his fifth novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004). The setting is “an immense archipelago of islands” “interposed between the sea and the plains of Bengal,” on the easternmost coast of India.⁸⁰ These “islands are the trailing threads of India’s fabric, the ragged fringe of her sari, the *achol*” where there “are no borders . . . to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea” (6-7). “(M)idwived by the moon,” and shorn of all prettiness, at “no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrain’s utter hostility to their presence, of its cunning and its resourcefulness, of its determination to destroy or expel them” (8). This place is called alternately the Sundarbans (literally, the beautiful forest), or ‘bhatir desh’, literally, the tide country. While the first name may have been “derived from the name of a common species of mangrove—the

sundari tree,” the second has been derived from “the record books of the Mughal emperors” which name the place after one particular tide, “the ebb-tide, the *bhata*” (8). The mangrove swamps and the tides are but two of the markers that define Ghosh’s setting, which includes the totality of the ecosystem of the region, made up of numerous rivers and river channels, pools of fresh water and salt water, ‘mohonas’, small and large inhabited and uninhabited islands and storms and cyclones. The varieties of life forms that the Sundarbans supports include different fish, snakes and reptiles, river dolphins, crabs, crocodiles and tigers. Steeped in folklore, the setting has its fair share of legends and myths, forms of syncretic religions and a contemporary history of migration and eviction. Ghosh’s setting functions, in a way, as an important character in the novel or rather as the most important character much like Hardy’s Egdon Heath.

The evocation of the tide country in the initial pages—in terms of its utter hostility to the presence of human beings—is somewhat perplexing. Evidently, the tide country in *The Hungry Tide* as ‘nature’ is pitted against man who, consequently, is seen as the outsider or the foreigner. In a way, this harks back to one of the most elemental and primitive hostilities: man versus nature that also carries connotations of culture versus nature debates. Such an evocation is indeed perplexing on two grounds: it runs contrary to what Ghosh’s fiction has come to stand for; and the Sundarbans has been known to support a large human population for quite sometime. This can be partly explained by the argument that such an evocation has not been directly narrated, but rather, refracted onto the narrative through the impressionistic accounts of one of the characters Nirmal, a failed revolutionary and a hesitant romantic. Moreover, the narrative constantly resonates with a play on the meanings of the words, outsider and foreigner, thereby, creating categories that may view the place alternately as hostile and/or friendly and inviting. Naturally, Ghosh’s text raises the fundamental and somewhat spiritual question of the relationship that exists between man and nature. While this question itself is an important one, curiously, in Ghosh’s text, significance is displaced from this question per se to the contexts which envelop it. There are multiple contexts in *The Hungry Tide*: a postcolonial context of a twice-displaced community, in conflict with the state, asserting its right over natural resources and the environment; the context of a fringe and marginalized community

eking out a precarious existence on the peripheries of the Indian mainland; and an Indian American animal rights activist whose world view, fashioned by the idiom of a large section of Western environmentalists, threatens to snap the delicate bond that exists between man and nature/animal in the tide country. These three contexts point to “different constituents of Indian society”—ecological refugees, ecosystem people and omnivores.⁸¹ These multiple contexts are woven together in the constantly changing and forever shifting dynamics of human relationships that posit the text as a remarkable instance where postcolonial criticism, environmentalism and ecocriticism converge as well as diverge. The next paragraph will give brief summaries of the sections that follow.

Section I of this chapter traces the evolution of ecocriticism by highlighting its scepticism of postmodern theory. It also surveys the emerging field of green postcolonialism, which is an attempt at resolving thorny issues between ecocriticism and postcolonial criticism. The discussion of the theoretical issues is especially relevant for the analysis of Ghosh’s novel that follows in the subsequent sections. Section II, which begins with a brief summary of the novel, analyzes the novel and the relevant issues therein based on the constantly evolving human relationship within the triad—Fokir, Piya and Kanai. Section III deals with Nirmal’s narrative on the Morichjāpi incident, the all-pervading Bon Bibi legend, and the duality of the ‘natural’ and the ‘cultural’. While both these sections are interspersed with analysis of the structure and the narrative strategy, section IV devotes itself to examining the narrative strategy used in the novel. On the one hand, it looks at the narrative structure as reproducing the diversity and the topographical features of the setting, and on the other, it analyzes the ways in which the urgency and immediacy of the issues generate the form and the narrative strategy of documentary realism.

I

In the editorial of a recent issue of the journal *Interventions*, the editors Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin try to identify the points at which the two seemingly diverse fields of postcolonialism and ecocriticism overlap and criss-cross each other. They argue that while colonial expansion of Europe into other territories from the fifteenth century onwards has “catastrophically resulted in genocide or the

dispossession and marginalization of indigenous peoples,” the replacement of traditional modes of agriculture and farming with the European model of cash cropping has damaged established ecosystems, reduced “soil fertility, or even, as in the case of the Sahara,” resulted in desertification (Huggan and Tiffin 1). While this automatically led to a breakdown of “the original accommodated relations between environment, humans and animals, . . . sometimes beyond repair” (1), the “broken communities” were sucked subsequently into a homogenizing code of development that condemned these communities forever to do the catching up in the ladder of progress:

The naturalization of uneven development relegated colonized peoples to a stage in the European past, and the *geography* of difference was reconfigured as a living *history* of the rise of civilized man, with European development as the natural goal. (2, italics in original)

This grafting of the geographical (spatial) onto the historical (temporal) is a favourite tool of colonial ideology with its in-built teleology of progress that also underpins George Basalla’s typology of dependent colonial science and independent ‘metropolitan science’. (For a fuller discussion of Basalla’s diffusionist model refer to section I of chapter 5.) At another level, this sort of reinscription of one category onto the other functions as a marker for distinguishing the ‘civilized’ from the ‘primitive’ (both temporal stages) by their relative proximity or otherwise to ‘nature’ (spatial): the more proximate to the natural world, the more primitive (3). Thus, the homogenizing master narrative of European colonialism, by effacing differences of time, culture, means of sustenance and subsistence etc., has placed colonized societies and environments on a linear narrative of civilization and progress that currently goes under the name of globalization:

The operation of the European empires both initiated and depended upon a globalism that still provides the economic, communicative and, at least to a degree, political foundation for the highly diverse interconnections grouped as ‘globalization’ today. (2)

Further, the editors opine that “the exploitation of the resources of formerly colonized countries and their co-optation to Euro-American world views continue under contemporary globalization” (2).

The editors are almost emphatic in suggesting that contemporary debates surrounding environment, especially in the former colonies, cannot be detached from the issues constantly raised in postcolonialism. Though “(i)deological convergence is rare within the two fields,” they contend that “attempts to distinguish between postcolonialism and ecocriticism are always likely to be perilous” (9). They go on to define “green postcolonialism,” their term for historical, cultural and ideological overlaps between the two fields, provisionally “in terms of those forms of environmentally oriented postcolonial criticism which insist on the factoring of cultural difference into both historical and contemporary ecological and bioethical debates” (9). Further,

(b)oth fields are constituted, for example, by the tension between aesthetic self-reflexivity and political commitment, or by that between spiritually and materially oriented understandings of the subject’s relation to the wider world—and worlds beyond. Both fields are also constituted, in large part, by the very humanisms they criticize. . . . Both postcolonialism and ecocriticism are, at least in part, utopian discourses aimed at providing *conceptual* possibilities for a *material* transformation of the world. (10, italics in original)

It seems important, at this point, to place this editorial in the right temporal perspective with regard to similar developments that straddle both the fields of ecocriticism and postcolonialism. Sometime back, 2004 to be precise, one of the editors, Graham Huggan, contributed an essay titled “Greening Postcolonialism: Ecocritical Perspectives” to an issue of the journal *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*. Based primarily on “a productive overlap between the tasks of ecocriticism and those of postcolonial criticism,” Huggan’s essay, a comparative study of three recent postcolonial texts, asks “what contemporary postcolonial and ecologically oriented literary/cultural criticism might have to offer one another at a time of global environmental crisis” (701-02). Citing references to the works of Third World scholars on environment like Madhav Gadgil, Ramachandra Guha and Vandana Shiva, and works of environmental critics and theoreticians like Deane Curtin and Alfred W. Crosby, Huggan displays an openness and alertness in conceding

that First World environmentalism, in assuming that its protest rhetoric and palliative measures are universally applicable, runs the risk of

turning itself into another, late-capitalist form of ‘ecological imperialism’. (702)

In conclusion, Huggan goes on to map the overlapping fields that include, among others, “historically situated critiques of capitalist ideologies of development”; more text-based approaches that foreground “the traditional discourses of environmental representation”; “(cross-)cultural implications of current ecocritical debates”; and questions of representation (719-20). Huggan’s essay has been one of the most emphatic and forthright statements in advocating a joint approach of both the fields:

For all that, some form of active exchange between the critical projects of postcolonialism and ecologism now seems urgently necessary—not just as collaborative means of addressing the social and environmental problems of the present, but also of imagining alternative futures in which our current ways of looking at ourselves and our relation to the world might be creatively transformed. (719-20)

This call for a heightened exchange and dialogue between the two fields is a laudable one and has been responded to enthusiastically, at least in part, with an attempt to fashion an African ecocriticism through a postcolonial and ecological reading of a text of Coetzee’s.⁸² As this attempt reveals, there are problematic and even recalcitrant issues involved in trying to constructively engage both ecocriticism and postcolonialism. Thus, the success of green postcolonialism is subject to the satisfactory resolution of these thorny issues, most of which can be attributed to ecocriticism’s inherent skepticism of some of poststructuralism’s (also postmodernism’s) premises. The editors of *The Ecocriticism Reader* define ecocriticism in the following manner: “Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. . . . ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies” (Glotfelty and Fromm xviii).⁸³ While this definition seems simple and somewhat naïve, the editors, very significantly, point to a tendency within ecocritics to “condemn post-structuralism for its seeming denial of a physical ground of meaning” (xxvii). It is understandable because ecocriticism, through its alliance with ecology and environmentalism, *has* to greatly invest in the physicality of nature. The editors of a special issue of the journal *New Literary History* outline ecocriticism’s “hermeneutic horizon” as “nothing short of the literal

horizon itself, the finite environment that a reader or writer occupies thanks not just to culturally coded determinants but also to natural determinants that antedate these, and will outlast them” (Tucker 505). Through an emphatic proclamation of ecocriticism’s hermeneutic territory, the editors bring into sharp focus the problematic of the nature versus culture dialectic that this field has to negotiate.⁸⁴ Glen A. Love, in his *Practical Ecocriticism*, enters the nature versus culture debate from a somewhat different opening:

It is one of the great mistaken ideas of anthropocentric thinking (and thus one of the cosmic ironies) that society is complex while nature is simple. . . . That literature in which nature plays a significant role is, by definition, irrelevant and inconsequential. That nature is dull and uninteresting, while society is sophisticated and interesting. (23)

Anthropocentrism’s tendency to vest society/culture with complexity at the expense of nature, thereby, dismissing nature as a possible subject of criticism, is read by Love as “(t)he great blind spot of postmodernism” (26). Further, citing the afore-mentioned editorial, Love remarks that because ecocriticism “encompasses nonhuman as well as human contexts and considerations,” it “bases its challenge to much postmodern critical discourse as well as to the critical systems of the past” (1).⁸⁵ Dana Phillips, in an essay published in the same issue of *New Literary History*, comes down severely on ecocriticism’s dislike for theory which, in his opinion, hinges on the crucial question of “the nature of representation.” He remarks:

They [ecocritics] are bothered, though, by theory’s contention that nature is constructed by culture. The constructedness of nature is a basic tenet of postmodernism, poststructuralism, and other forms of theory sharing the same feeling of belatedness and the common conviction that representation is always already inadequate. (578)

While Phillips also takes into account other issues like ecocriticism’s distaste for an alleged metropolitan bias in much of theory (584) and its call for “a spirit of commitment to environmental praxis” (583), his critique ultimately gravitates towards the crucial question of representation.⁸⁶ Further, Phillips is critical of Buell’s and, by extension, ecocriticism’s call “for a return to realism” because he apprehends that “(i)f ecocriticism limits itself to reading realistic texts realistically, its practitioners may be reduced to an umpire’s role, squinting to see if a given description of a

painted trillium or a live oak tree is itself well-painted and lively” (586). In other words, if Phillips is to be believed, ecocriticism harks back to nineteenth-century realism because it meets a basic tenet of the discipline: a faithful portrayal of nature.

At this crucial juncture, it becomes necessary to discuss the nature of representation in the context of the aesthetic of realism. As a narrative mode of representation, realism is basically a nineteenth-century aesthetic predicated essentially upon the assumed transparency of representation that seeks to faithfully and authentically represent external reality. When deconstruction questioned the existence of any such external reality that was not linguistically mediated, thereby dismissing the questions of fidelity, accuracy, and truth of representation, it also reduced all linguistically mediated representation to the status of linguistic artifacts. While every text was proclaimed as a construct that produced a reality of its own as the result of the competing forces within, even systems of thought like ideology and patterns of organization like culture were marked as constructs. It follows somewhat naturally that nature as represented in texts is also a construct that needs to be differentiated from the nature environmentalists and ecologists work upon. This textually constructed and culturally coded status of nature in theory has come to be highly resented by ecocriticism that justifiably refuses to concede that the object and subject of the discipline’s focus, at once elemental and physical, is reduced in theoretical jargon to a mere construct. While ecocritics concede that nature “is an abstraction,” they insist that “it is also an imposing material presence in whose highly contested fate we are all deeply implicated, inextricably bound to it through our Darwinian bodies and their equally evolved brains” (Love, *Practical* 26). This theoretical spin-off makes ecocriticism’s engagement with postcolonialism uneasy since, as a discourse of resistance and contestation, postcolonialism has derived potency from many tenets of poststructuralism. Rob Nixon has identified “four main schisms between the dominant concerns of postcolonialists and ecocritics” that have ensured a relationship of “reciprocal indifference or mistrust” (Nixon 235). The first three schisms outlined by Nixon can be conflated into one: while postcolonialists tend to foreground and favor hybridity, cross-culturation, displacement, dislocated communities and the cosmopolitan and the transnational, ecocritics “have historically been drawn more to discourses of purity,” “an ethics of place,” bioregionalism and

settled communities (235). The fourth schism surrounds history: whereas postcolonialism is preoccupied with “excavating or reimagining the marginalized past,” ecocriticism tends to privilege pursuit of nature over history. Nixon says:

Postcolonial critics are wary of the role that this strain of environmental writing (especially wilderness writing) has played in burying the very histories that they themselves have sought to unearth. (235)

Postcolonial criticism then has been resoundingly anthropocentric whereas ecocriticism has been emphatically ecocentric or biocentric. Nixon’s essay, a fair enough assessment of how the trajectories of the two fields have developed, points to the potential slippages to which the attempt to constructively engage postcolonialism and ecocriticism may be subject.

Whatever the difficulties, the call for green postcolonialism cannot be abandoned outright. Graham Huggan’s essay, the editorial jointly written with Tiffin and, most recently, Vital’s attempt to fashion an African ecocriticism are timely interventions in the emerging field green postcolonialism or postcolonial ecocriticism, some of the parameters of which these texts try to set out. In tracing a colonial genealogy of contemporary environmental crises especially in the third world countries, they are able to draw attention to the continuity that lurks below the apparent ‘universalism’ of the major strands of Western environmental movement. Because these apparent universalisms are co-terminus with the colonial bogey of homogenization, both Huggan and Tiffin have rightly called for factoring of cultural difference into both historical and contemporary ecological and bioethical debates. One may be tempted to dismiss this as a case of cultural relativism but, as some of the Indian scholars have shown, the human costs of such dismissal may be immense. In this context, one should also refer to Indian scholars on environment like Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha whose works resonate with some of the dominant issues raised in the field of green postcolonialism. *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India* (1995) by Gadgil and Guha offers nuanced and context-based analysis of various environmental challenges and different strands of environmental movements in India. Very importantly, they are able to trace crucial continuities from the colonial times to contemporary crises, and, at the same time, are able to argue that the peculiar history and situation of the Indian experience merit

models different from the dominant Western ones. Some of these arguments are fully developed by Guha in *How Much Should a Person Consume? Thinking through the Environment* (2006) where he advances a brilliant and an extremely subtle distinction between the Indian environmental movement and its American counterpart (62-67). By focusing on a series of environmental movements as well as interventions during the 1970s, Guha punctures one of the initial claims made on behalf of Western environmentalists “that a developing country like India could not afford to be environmentally prudent” (58). On the contrary, Guha argues that such movements and interventions “showed in fact that . . . environmental degradation had greater social costs in a poor country and generated more intensive social conflicts” (58). Prior to this, in *Environmentalism: A Global History* (2000), Guha offers a sweeping account of environmentalism in the global context that also helped to identify the commonalities and contrasts of different environmental movements at different times and in different places. While these significant studies tacitly hinted at possible overlap between environmentalism and postcolonial criticism, they did/could not indicate, emerging as they did from non-literary backgrounds, that there could be possible and potentially rewarding convergences of environmentalism, ecocriticism and postcolonial criticism.

The contours of this creative-discursive space of convergence and divergence are still hazy and indistinct while the ground is soft and pliable. At this crucial temporal and spatial juncture, Amitav Ghosh’s fifth novel, *The Hungry Tide*, enters the fray not as a discursive text, but as a piece of creative literature that self-consciously yet quite tentatively straddles the three worlds of environmentalism, ecocriticism and postcolonialism. Does the novel provide a way out of this seeming impasse? The following sections will analyse Ghosh’s novel in the light of the discussion above and weigh it as an instance of green postcolonialism.

II

The novel begins in a manner typical of realistic novel with an identifiable and richly evoked context. Two outsiders board a commuter train to Canning, a ghostly port town built and abandoned by the British that now serves as the railhead for the Sundarbans. Piyali Roy, a cetologist from the USA, is headed for the Sundarbans in

order to study river dolphins. Kanai Dutt, an interpreter and businessman from New Delhi, is on his way to Lusibari, one of the inhabited islands in the tide country, to meet his *mashima* Nilima Bose, a well-known non-governmental organization (NGO) worker who runs a charitable hospital. Their conversation on the train reveals that while Kanai knows six languages, Piya knows only English. This, coupled with Kanai's invitation to visit him at Lusibari, ensures that in the second half of the narrative both meet again after parting ways at Canning. Piya is officially provided with an armed forest guard for her safety, and the guard leads her to hire a launch of an acquaintance of his at an exorbitant price. Once they are in the delta, things begin to take a turn for the worse as she grows restless of no sightings of river dolphins. In trying to pass on some currency notes to a local fisherman Fokir, she trips over and falls into the river, but is saved from drowning by Fokir. Sensing an opportunity to get rid of the utterly unhelpful and vulgar guard, she joins Fokir and his son on their boat for carrying out her research. Displaying an amazing and immaculate knowledge of his surroundings, Fokir leads Piya straight into a pod of dolphins and over the next two days the cetologist is enabled to gather enough data for her research.

While Piya is on water, Kanai, the other outsider, is on the island of Lusibari trying to make sense of the material in the diary his dead uncle has left him. The diary narrates events surrounding the encroachment by illegal settlers on Morichjāpi, a tide country island, and their ultimate eviction by the government in 1979. As Kanai reads the contents of the diary, the narrative of the novel simultaneously recounts many other things: the memories of Kanai's earlier visit some thirty years ago, the multiple histories of the place he had been told by his now dead uncle etc. The plot is so worked out that while Piya on water is with Fokir, Kanai on the island interacts with Fokir's wife, Moyna, a confident and pragmatic lady who nurtures ambitions of becoming a nurse in the hospital at Lusibari run by Kanai's aunt. On her third day in the Sundarbans, Piya comes into this setting led by Fokir. For an unusually rare moment in the narrative, all the major characters find themselves on the island. From this point onwards, the narrative begins to shape up for a climax where the past and the present, myth and history, land and water, man, animal and nature are interlocked in a complex web. On her next trip out into the sea, Piya's entourage includes Kanai as an interpreter, Fokir as the guide and Fokir's relative Horen and his grandson. On

the journey, they witness the gruesome burning of a tiger that jolts Piya to the reality of the man-nature/animal conflict in the tide country. Amongst the most important parts of the narrative, this brings about a transformation in Piya's conservationist outlook and ethics that is employed by the novelist to project one particular viewpoint of ecological conservation. Kanai also has a brush with reality in his one on one with Fokir that shakes him up from within and causes fundamental changes to his worldview. The narrative climaxes in a scene depicting a typical tide country cyclone, a 'jhor'. While Kanai, Horen and Horen's grandson safely reach Lusibari, Fokir and Piya are stranded on one of the tide country islands and take refuge on a branch of a mangrove tree. Fokir is exposed to the fury of the storm and is fatally hit by a big projectile. He saves Piya's life again but sacrifices his own in the process. The Epilogue shows Piya returning to Lusibari, her conservationist outlook greatly altered. She plans to start a project in the memory of Fokir under the supervision of Nilima's organization, to study dolphin conservation measures that do not impact the livelihood of the local fisher folk.

A cetologist from Seattle, USA, Piya is one of the central characters in the novel. She may even be seen as *the* central character, the pivot of the narrative because the novelist clearly assigns significance to the transformation in Piya's conservationist outlook. Piya immediately reminds the readers of Ila, the globe-trotting cousin of the narrator in *The Shadow Lines*, who tries hard to disown her Indian lineage. Of Indian parentage but brought up exclusively in the US, Piya has had an upbringing which is atypical. Her father, who has his pet theories about immigrants and refugees, believes that Indians—Bengalis in particular—do not travel well. Therefore, when he settled in the USA, he decided not to look back and fit in the new country (250). Her identity in the text is liminal: she is an Indian American and a woman whose professional career is unusual to say the least, for her gender and these aspects of her character are seen in her inability to understand and speak Bengali and her professional expertise which includes the use of sophisticated scientific instruments. Though these features of her identity mark her out exclusively as a foreigner, she displays at the same time traits of hybridity, who responds to the surroundings and the people in far more accommodating ways than, say, Kanai, an outsider but not a foreigner.⁸⁷ It is actually the absence of an unmistakable foreignness

on her part as well the lack of an equally unmistakable Indian upper-middle-class upbringing that makes her, for the forest guard and his acquaintance, an object of immediate erotic interest (34). Piya's hybridity, though not an overriding indicator of her character, nevertheless occasions mixed responses in Kanai and Fokir. Initially an object of curiosity for Kanai, his growing interest in her pits him in a rivalry with Fokir, for whom she holds a strange fascination that belies the real life status and situations of both. Even Nilima gets mixed up by Piya's appearance and forgets that she cannot use Bangla with her (249).

Curiosity about Piya is also occasioned in part by the nature of her work. She is a young woman on her own hopping across inhospitable terrains to gather data on the dwindling population of river dolphins:

She had worked everywhere Irrawaddy dolphins were to be found: Burma, northern Australia, the Philippines, coastal Thailand—everywhere, in fact, except the place where they first entered the record-book of zoological reckoning, India. (307)

Broadly speaking, she is a researcher and in that capacity she belongs to a long line of Ghosh's characters who also are the same: Tridib in *The Shadow Lines*, Murugan in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Jaya in *The Glass Palace* and Ghosh himself in *In An Antique Land*. Precisely speaking, she is a conservationist whose survey of river dolphins, their habitats and their habits is meant to lead to better conservationist techniques for the rapidly declining endangered species. Her conservationist outlook has been fashioned by American thinking on wilderness, protected areas and deep ecology, essentially a biocentric or ecocentric perspective on nature conservation. In Ramachandra Guha's words, the dominant thrust of such thinking "is toward the protection of pristine, unspoilt nature" for the sake of nature itself (*How* 67). At another place, Guha contends that "in philosophical terms," the conservationist outlook of such thinking and movements seems to be fashioned by a "*biocentrism*, which rejects a human-centered perspective by looking at history from the perspective of other species and nature as a whole" (*Environmentalism* 85, italics in original).⁸⁸ Guha's enunciation can be used to understand Piya's conservationist outlook and praxis. Armed with institutional and financial support, sophisticated gadgets, and a top down approach informed by the "belief . . . that the presence of humans was

always and invariably a threat to other species” (Guha, *Environmentalism* 86), Piya descends into the Sundarbans to carry out her survey which, however, does not take into account the local population. For sure, she meets Fokir and seeks his help, but the meeting is a chance one and, at any rate, Fokir has no stakes involved in dolphin conservation. Interpreted from such lofty heights, Fokir becomes the quintessential threat to the species that Piya loves, and therefore a potential antagonist to Piya herself.

All the knowledge of the cruelties done to river dolphins that Piya has gathered in her travels across the world fades into insignificance in comparison to the shocking burning of a tiger which for her was “like something from some other time—before recorded history” (300). When she says that Fokir is “a part of the horror too,” Kanai challenges her by pointing out that even they are complicit in the horror because they can feel the suffering of an animal, but not of human beings (300-01). He continues:

‘Because it was people like you,’ said Kanai, ‘who made a push to protect the wildlife here, without regard for the human costs. And I’m complicit because people like me—Indians of my class, that is—have chosen to hide these costs, basically in order to curry favour with their Western patrons.’ (301)

Kanai’s argument forms the core of a major strand of Indian and, by extension, postcolonial environmental thinking that some of the Indian scholars, most notably Ramachandra Guha, have been espousing. Kanai’s argument contests the biocentrism and ecocentrism evident in the partisan worldview of Piya (and, by extension, deep ecology) and writes into it strands of anthropocentric thinking. He succinctly articulates the hegemony visible in, what Shalini Randeria calls, “new globalized forms of ecological governmentality” (Randeria 15). In her case study of the wildlife protection of Gir Forest, Randeria traces a colonial genealogy of many environmental interventions that “have served to further entrench colonial mechanisms of surveillance and control of nature as well as of local populations” (13). In her opinion, the hegemonic mechanisms strive for “a standardized syntax of ‘biodiversity and ‘protected areas’” and a “common vocabulary of comprehension” “for the interpretation and management of local differences”:

The new hegemony thus lies in making plausible a single uniform interpretive grid to define natural diversity, and a single set of scientific and institutional practices to manage it. (16)

Randeria is not alone in exposing the hegemony that sweeps under the carpet local differences: Graham Huggan also reads problems into such a type of first-world environmentalism that actually runs the risk of turning itself into another, late-capitalist form of ecological imperialism. Further, Huggan and Tiffin's editorial point to a hegemonistic globalism and globalization that has continued from the colonial times (1-4). Anthony Vital's attempt at fashioning an African ecocriticism is similarly subject to the fulfillment of the "need to be rooted in local (regional, national) concern for social life and its natural environment" (88). Even Nixon's analysis that while postcolonialists have tended to foreground hybridity and cross-culturation ecocritics have historically been drawn more to discourses of purity can be read as difference contesting homogeneity (235). In the light of this discussion, Piya's entry into a peripheral region inhabited by marginalized people and her collaboration with a local fisherman result in a crisis, in the scene depicting the gruesome burning of a tiger (289-95). This scene is the fulcrum on which hinges the outcome of not only the human drama unfolding between Piya, Kanai and Fokir, but also the material debates regarding the ethics of conservation and the philosophical debates of man's complex relation to his environment—nature in other words. Confronted with an impasse, Ghosh's text tries to negotiate a way out, to find a resolution or a compromise that is charted through the character of Fokir.

Structurally, the narrative of the novel can be said to have been telescoped between Piya's accidental tumble into the waters at the beginning and the scene of the cyclone toward the end: on both occasions, Fokir saves her life, sacrificing his life during the cyclone. A fisherman and a crab catcher from the island of Lusibari (originally from a different island named Satjelia) and the son of Kusum, a girl Kanai had known and played with on his first visit to the tide country, he is the husband of the educated and the ambitious Moyna. To the readers of Ghosh's fiction, Fokir's silence carries traces of Alu in *The Circle of Reason* while his association with boats resonates with memories of the young Rajkumar in *The Glass Palace*. Eking out an existence on the margins of the nation, Fokir belongs to the category of "ecosystem

people” who “depend on the natural environment of their own locality to meet most of their material needs” (Gadgil and Guha 3). Outside the economic process of production, Fokir is only tangentially connected to the nation that geographically lays claim to his territory. Like Piya—who was born in Calcutta but is a resident of the US—Fokir was also born in a part of Bihar but is now a resident of the tide country. Essentially a child at heart, Fokir feels at home on water, takes great pleasure in catching crabs, fishing, singing hymns to Bon Bibi etc. His existence is so completely and so symbiotically bound up with his surroundings that it is only natural to look at Fokir as nature’s child.⁸⁹ The ultimate exemplar of man-nature relationship, Fokir challenges the

biocentric view of the antagonistic relationship between society and nature, [where] nature is represented as self-regulating pristine wilderness that is threatened by the unsustainable resource use and ecologically harmful lifestyle of the local population. (Randeria 17)

As an inhabitant of the tide country, Fokir’s lifestyle poses no threat to his surroundings and neither to the other species. In fact, Fokir’s immaculate—almost intuitive—knowledge and understanding of the river dolphins significantly constitutes his character and personality that, in turn, may be posited as a creative resolution of the seemingly intractable impasse arising out of the schisms of postcolonialism, ecocriticism and environmentalism. Having said that, it has to be kept in mind that Fokir’s active involvement in the burning of the tiger foregrounds an altogether different facet. We have to examine if this tiger-burning episode sings Fokir’s child-like innocence.

Fokir’s anthropocentrism and Piya’s biocentrism, as has been mentioned a couple of paragraphs before, are antagonistic to each other and the antagonism has the power to potentially damage their relationship. Do their respective -isms, which each of them seemingly represent, ultimately create a non-negotiable impasse between them? Of all the pairs of relationships in the novel—Nirmal-Nilima, Kanai-Piya, Fokir-Moyna etc.—Piya and Fokir happen to understand one another better than the rest. This essentially means that the respective -isms, which they seemingly represent, are not significant constitutive elements of their respective personalities. They are marginal players and peripheral determinants that have no control over the dynamics

of Piya-Fokir relationship. It is remarkable to note that even if their antagonistic worldviews are not considered, there is hardly anything that both share in common: Piya is a foreigner while Fokir is a native; she is educated, cosmopolitan and middle-class whereas he is unlettered, poor and a subaltern; and while her lifestyle has been peripatetic Fokir's has been rooted to one particular geography. In this last distinction, Ghosh's novel presents at least one instance when ecocritical and postcolonial concerns converge and overlap. This distinction, an important example of Nixon's call for rapprochement between the two fields (247), functions by altering the structure of one of the four schisms he identifies. Of the two, Fokir is the postcolonial subject but he is a rooted individual whereas Piya, carrying the baggage of biocentrism, is the peripatetic cosmopolitan. However, the most crucial difference between Piya and Fokir is language: she knows only English whereas Fokir knows only Bangla. For the most part of the narrative, this strange relationship either remains linguistically inarticulate, or is mediated through Kanai's translations and interpretations. In fact, it is Kanai's invitation to Piya to visit him at Lusibari (13-14) that actually sets the ball rolling for her deepening acquaintance with Fokir. Only when Fokir nods in acknowledgement to the words Mashima and Lusibari, that Piya decides to leave the launch and shift to Fokir's boat (57). Despite all these, their relationship remains remarkably independent off all such damaging factors right from the outset. When Fokir creates an enclosure for Piya to let her change her dress in private, Piya is visibly touched by this modest gesture of a rustic:

It was not just that he had thought to create a space for her; it was as if he had chosen to include her in some simple, practised family ritual, found a way to let her know that despite the inescapable muteness of their exchanges, she was a person to him and not, as it were, a representative of a species, a faceless, tongueless foreigner. (71)

At moments like this, when there is no interpreter and translator, it is as if Ghosh takes over the roles of both translator and interpreter. In his enthusiasm to push this relationship in certain directions, Ghosh seems to intrude into the narrative, thereby preempting emotions and imputing meanings to this fledgling relationship.⁹⁰ Anyway, the two days that she spends on the boat in the company of Fokir and his son, Tutul, are not only "one of the most exciting experiences of my [her] life" (268), these two days also provide her with enough data for her purpose. She also visits the shrine of

Bon Bibi on the island of Garjontola, witnesses forms of syncretic religion in Fokir's prayers and is again saved by Fokir, this time from a crocodile attack after which they head toward Lusibari.

Betraying a high degree of consciousness about Fokir, Piya remains alert to every small gesture and detail of Fokir. The dynamics of their mute relationship is somewhat paralleled by the nature of their work. Though the pool supplies the objects for both, Piya's river dolphins Fokir's crabs, they are perfectly able to carry out their individual jobs without obstructing each other. This leads Piya to speculate on the nature of the dynamics that exists between the two:

It was surprising enough that their jobs had not proved to be utterly incompatible . . . But that it had proved possible for two such different people to pursue their own ends simultaneously—people who could not exchange a word with each other and had no idea of what was going on in one another's heads—was far more surprising: it seemed almost miraculous. (141)

Piya is convinced that apart from the biographical fact that both had lost their mothers early (218), there “was much in common between us” which ensured that their mutual linguistic intelligibility during those two days didn't matter at all (268). When Kanai insists on driving home the differences between the two—“He's a fisherman and you're a scientist. What you see as fauna he sees as food”—she becomes somewhat indifferent to his protestations (268-9). Jolted by Fokir's involvement in the burning of the tiger, Piya tenders an apology to Kanai for being stupid enough to believe that there was something common between the two (296-7). However, this proves to be just a momentary low in their relationship.

What is the source of their intangible but real intimacy despite the many obvious differences? The answer has to be sought in the context of the nature-culture dialectic. Essentially, the differences of nationality, class, education and language, though seminal as well as powerful, are all culturally coded determinants and constructs. Although they control the destinies of both the characters to some extent, they cannot ultimately triumph because Fokir and Piya are not simply discursive constructs constituted by their respective positions, situations and biographies. Also

their engagement is with nature, though from entirely different planks. Finally, they are individual characters, independent human subjects. Their culturally coded identities melt in the Sundarbans, a region where nature is at its most elemental, and which has spawned and shaped local cultures. Nature in *The Hungry Tide* is an overarching and almost transcendental entity that initially helps in guiding Fokir and Piya to the river dolphins and finally helps in fusing their bodies together through the agency of a natural phenomenon cyclone:

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. (390)

Natural determinants not only outweigh, outlast and antedate the cultural determinants (Tucker 505), they also crucially show that human nature and “human thought and behaviour” are actually independent of culture (Love, *Practical* 162). Can *The Hungry Tide*, in reestablishing a connection between human beings and nature that is not culturally and linguistically coded and mediated, be seen as a text that satisfies requirements set up by ecocriticism?

As already said, the transformation in Piya’s conservationist outlook is an important aspect of the novel. Her top down approach, which mandates that practices developed in the metropole will be summarily transferred to the colony without local consultation and participation, gravitates towards a more participatory one:

‘You know a lot about the people who live here,’ Piya said. ‘And for myself I know that I don’t want to do the kind of work that places the burden of conservation on those who can least afford it. If I was to take on a project here, I’d want it to be under the sponsorship of the Badabon Trust, so it could be done in consultation with the fishermen who live in these parts.’ (397)

Huggan and Tiffin argue that Ghosh has made Piya’s transformation seem possible and even plausible by displacing the clash of interests from the human versus tiger problem to the human versus dolphin problem. In their opinion, Piya’s transformation “is only possible because the local people have no particular problem with the dolphins”:

The much more intractable problem of the tiger (and its sanctuary) on which the novel is premised is displaced by the relatively easy dolphin 'solution', and neither a practical nor a philosophical management of the problem is offered. (5)

While the problem of tiger sanctuary will be discussed in the next section, Piya's transformation can be read, in the words of Huggan and Tiffin, as an insistence on the factoring of cultural differences into both historical and contemporary ecological and bioethical debates (9). Ghosh's novel may be seen as creatively establishing a balance between ecocriticism, postcolonialism and environmentalism.

III

The Hungry Tide, much like *The Calcutta Chromosome*, has a 'double-helix' structure: while the contemporary plot has been woven around Fokir, Piya and Kanai, and the conservation of river dolphins, the plot back in time is woven around Nirmal, Nilima, Kusum, and the Morichjāpi incident. Unlike the earlier novel, the distant plot in *The Hungry Tide* is not very far removed temporally. More importantly, it is incorporated as a narrative text written by one of the characters and translated by Kanai.⁹¹ The narrative text, in the form of a diary, is left to Kanai by Nirmal Bose, Kanai's uncle and a retired headmaster of a school in Lusibari. A teacher of English Literature earlier as well as a leftist intellectual and a writer of promise whose marriage with Nilima is solemnized by readings of Blake, Mayakovsky and Jibananda Das, Nirmal leaves behind his job and career in Calcutta. His radicalism and involvement in left-wing politics forces the couple to move to Lusibari though Nirmal is reluctant initially to be associated with "an enterprise founded by a leading capitalist" (78). An admirer of Rainer Maria Rilke, from whose *Duino Elegies* he quotes at length in his narrative, he is a dreamer, a poet, a teller of stories, a hesitant romantic, an idealist, a historical materialist and a failed Marxist. Nirmal's response to the destitution and poverty in Lusibari is governed by his idealism and Marxism whereas Nilima's is guided by her practical instinct:

Nirmal, overwhelmed, read and reread Lenin's pamphlet without being able to find any definite answers. Nilima, ever practical, began to talk to the women who gathered at the wells and the ponds. (80)

With her practical interventions Nilima is able to build two lasting institutions: the hospital at Lusibari and the Badabon Trust, an NGO. Nirmal, ever enthusiastic about a would-be Marxist revolution, is left to only sneer at Nilima's social work, which he dismisses as a true Marxist, as an extended arm of the rulers and the government (120 and 214). Thus, when Nirmal detects the seeds of a proletariat revolution from below in the efforts of the settlers in Morichjāpi, he joins them in the hope that finally the Marxist ideal of the proletariat revolution would materialize. However, it is nipped in the bud and Nirmal's idealism fails to materialize. In Ghosh's narrative, there is a constant tension between Nilima's way of bringing about social justice and Nirmal's yearning belief in the revolution.

The Morichjāpi incident centres on a group of mainly Dalit refugees, hailing originally from the East Pakistan/Bangladesh part of the tide country, who had been relocated by the government authorities in a resettlement camp in "a place called Dandakaranya, deep in the forests of Madhya Pradesh, hundreds of kilometers from Bengal" (118). The refugees are unhappy with their displacement on three counts: the camp is more like a concentration camp or a prison; the grey and rocky terrain of the camp does not suit their lifestyle modeled on the shifting landscape of the tide country; and the local people are hostile, often attacking them with bows, arrows and other weapons (118). The refugees' decision to move eastwards and settle on one of the tide country islands is a classic case of a community 'twice displaced' in the postcolonial state: the original displacement, a forced one, being a fallout of colonialism. As regards the second displacement, the refugees had expected to be sympathetically accommodated by the changed guard at Calcutta, but as it turns out their voluntary displacement brings them into confrontation with the authorities.⁹² The reason is that Morichjāpi, the tide country island they had settled in, is reserved for tiger conservation. However hard they try to mould public opinion in their favour by enlisting the support of writers, journalists and intellectuals, they are brutally evicted from the island and sent back to the resettlement camp in Central India. Ghosh presents a situation which recent theorists attempt to understand as an instance of "the clash between contemporary conservationist aims and the rights of local indigenous peoples" in which "particular groups can find themselves targeted by their own governments—on behalf of multinational companies, but also or alternatively on

behalf of international environmental and animal conservation NGOs” (Huggan and Tiffin 3-4). A displaced community’s claim to land and resources within the geographical boundaries of the nation becomes “a defense of the locality, or of the local community, against the nation” (Guha, *How* 64).⁹³ The use of the terms ‘local indigenous peoples’ and ‘local community’ for the settlers, whom the government sees ‘as squatters and land-grabbers,’ may require some explanation. Essentially speaking, the displaced community originally hails from the tide country and their displacement is an effect of colonialist policies as well as nation-building processes. Moreover, the ethnographic details of the novel make it amply clear that the settlers belong to the tide country community and share with the inhabitants of the tide country not only language, but food, habits, customs, legends and kinship ties. The settlers, who are refugees, have no evident problems with the inhabitants who are helpful and accommodating. Most importantly, they are connected with the inhabitants of the tide country through the crucial ‘tiger question’. Thus, the settlers form a local community not only metaphorically, but also materially: the reason for which they are driven out (tiger) is brought to a flashpoint some years later by the inhabitants of the tide country.

Having said that the refugees had close ethnographic affinities with the lifestyle of the tide country people, it becomes imperative that their eviction be interpreted in the broader framework of the antagonism between the tiger and the humans. Without in any way discounting their position as a twice-displaced community in fight with the authorities (by extension, the state and the nation), it might be rewarding to look at their situation from a philosophical perspective. In some ways, the antagonism between the tiger and the inhabitants of the tide country is both ‘natural’ as well as ‘cultural’. It’s natural because the tiger and the human habitats are not only proximate, but also overlapping. Fokir, accused of being a poacher by the forest guard because he is fishing in an off-limits area, has to pay a bribe to escape being booked. Similarly, Kusum’s father is killed by a tiger when foraging for firewood in an off-limits area, and the family is denied compensation because he did not possess a permit (100). In her paper on the protection of Asiatic lion in India’s Gir forest, Randeria has shown how the policies of the state and the government earmark specific areas within the forest for conservation. This

geographical demarcation creates different territories within a contiguous area, and some of these territories are subsequently declared as off-limits area for humans. In the Sundarbans also, there are areas and islands like Morichjāpi that are earmarked for tiger conservation. However, the shifting landscape of the terrain renders such a demarcation virtually impossible resulting in antagonism between the two species. The task of tiger conservation in the tide country is doubly difficult because of the ‘cultural’ aspect: in the all pervading legend of Bon Bibi, the demon invariably appears in the guise of a tiger.

As a typical Calcutta child accustomed to going to theatres and cinemas, Kanai is reluctant initially to see the performance of *The Glory of Bon Bibi* on his first visit to Lusibari. However, the force of the narrative and the immediacy of the emotions therein surprise him pleasantly so that “even before the performance had ended Kanai knew he wanted to see it again” (105). The legend, a fantasy, begins surprisingly in the deserts of Arabia when a pious Sufi faqir becomes the father of Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli, blessed twins chosen for a divine mission of making the country of eighteen tides fit for human habitation. Bon Bibi and Shah Jongoli rout Dokkhin Rai—the powerful demon king of the tide country—and his hordes, divide the tide country into two equal halves and make one half fit for human habitation. In the second part of the legend, the blessed twins turn saviour and save the life of a poor, hapless boy, Dukhey, from the clutches of a tiger (Dokkhin Rai in disguise) thereby giving rise to the law of the forest, which is that “the rich and the greedy would be punished while the poor and the righteous were rewarded” (105). This legend is also in circulation in the form of a long song consisting of cantos and written in a complex metre, *dwipodi poyar*, parts of which Kanai translates for Piya as a parting gift. In the brief introduction addressed to Piya, Kanai mentions that the Bon Bibi legend was not merely a legend, it “was a history . . . of this place, the tide country” and for Fokir, it “was the story that gave this land its life” and that “still plays a part in making him the person he is” (354). When, as an unlettered young child, Fokir recounts the story to Nirmal, the proud mother Kusum comments that “these words have become a part of him” (248). Even a die-hard Marxist like Nirmal, for whom the legend and similar other religious beliefs of the islanders are nothing

but false consciousness (101 and 222), is surprised at the pervasiveness of the Bon Bibi legend.

If one considers *The Hungry Tide* as an ethnographic narrative, the Bon Bibi cult can be seen as one of the central metaphors around which the lives of the islanders are structured and organized. The history of the settlement of the tide country says that a Scotsman, Sir Daniel Hamilton, was primarily instrumental in turning the tide country safe and hospitable for human settlement. Nirmal knows this history and it seems, from only a single reference in the text, that the inhabitants were also aware of it.⁹⁴ However, apart from that single reference, the narrative is otherwise resoundingly silent as regards the inhabitants' knowledge of the tide country's history. For Fokir and the islanders, their history is inextricably bound up with the legend of Bon Bibi for not only do they believe that the forests of the tide country were cleared and made hospitable by Bon Bibi, they also take her to be their protector and guardian angel. Pujas are organized by making clay figurines, supplications are made at the time of distress, and little shrines outside the houses are built in the honour of these deities. The most remarkable aspect of this legend is that it has spawned a syncretic religion of sorts, an odd mixture of Hinduism and Islam that baffles both Nirmal and Piya. The inclusiveness of their syncretic practices melts geographical borders and cultural differences and perhaps is the chief reason why the inhabitants have no confrontation with the refugee settlers. For the practitioners of this syncretism however, there is nothing odd or baffling as no character displays any trace of self-consciousness regarding this. Once again, the boundaries get blurred in Ghosh's fiction. Perhaps the legend derives its dynamism and force because it has spiritual as well as quotidian significance.

In the context of the above discussion, one can say that the response of the inhabitants of the tide country to the tiger is first 'cultural', and then 'natural'. The above discussion suggests that Fokir's participation in the burning of the tiger, howsoever shocking it might seem to Piya, is always already culturally coded. Speaking in strict terms, Fokir has no material stakes involved in the incident as it happens far from Lusibari. Essentially, the culturally coded antagonism, which he shares with every islander, drives him to participate in the act of burning the tiger.

That the antagonism and fear is absolute is evident from the taboo that prohibits the use of the word *bāgh*, because to say it is to call it. Similarly, Fokir's relation to the river dolphins, which are seen as Bon Bibi's messengers, can also be interpreted as culturally coded. On the strength of the argument, can one claim that the ultimate eviction of the settlers from Morichjāpi is always already decided as a result of the culturally coded antagonism between the tiger and the local population? Surely, Ghosh is not proposing culture as a monolith that is free and independent of all other considerations, nature included. It has been argued that nature is an elemental force in *The Hungry Tide* that has spawned local cultures. This cultural (somewhat philosophical) reasoning does not mean that the eviction of the settlers has no environmental or natural reason. In fact, Ghosh should be given due credit for doing a fine balancing act by tempering the narration of the Bon Bibi legend with two incidents that essentially serve as 'reality checks'. First, Kusum's call to Bon Bibi to save her father's life goes unanswered (107-9), and second, the shrine at Garjontola is uprooted and hurtled as a projectile in the storm (382). As an ethnographer then, Ghosh resists the temptation of valorizing the ethnic community through this act of tightrope walking. At any rate, the Morichjāpi incident shows that in *The Hungry Tide* the duality of the natural and the cultural are diluted to the extent that they seem to collapse into each other.

IV

Structurally, *The Hungry Tide* has many similarities with *The Shadow Lines*. Both the novels are divided into two parts each and the title of each part indicates a direction or a movement that is predicated upon an assumed centre.⁹⁵ Whereas the earlier novel is fundamentally a memory narrative, the later one has sufficient parts that are narrated through the memory of one of the characters. The middle-aged Kanai remembering his first visit to Lusibari as a child chimes well with the narrator trying to recuperate his childhood in *The Shadow Lines*. Moreover, in both the novels, there is a set each of uncle and nephew—Tridib and the narrator in *The Shadow Lines* and Nirmal and Kanai in *The Hungry Tide*—and the elder one in each case dreams, imagines and has stories to tell.⁹⁶ Both have very similar perceptions of space and place: for Nirmal "(a) place is what you make of it" (283) and, for Tridib, "a place

does not merely exist . . . it has to be invented in one's imagination" (21). There is one more similarity: Tridib dies in a riot and Nirmal is caught up in a riot-like situation and is found dead after some days. The similarities are many, but it must be borne in mind that while in the earlier novel memory is the structural and the narrative principle, in *The Hungry Tide* the Sundarbans, which is the setting of the novel, enjoys the same status.⁹⁷ The Sundarbans has a significance that deeply permeates the novel: just as it supports myriad forms of life, it also sustains and nourishes the various narratives and the characters thereof. It is the central metaphor that informs the lived lives of the characters and the narrative.

Structurally, *The Hungry Tide* also has similarities with *The Calcutta Chromosome*. The latter novel, a science fiction and a detective story, has two narratives unfolding almost simultaneously—Ronald Ross's search for the malaria parasite and Murugan's search for the secret history of malaria research. It forms a double-helix structure that not only joins the two narratives, but also allows for the introduction of other smaller narratives. This double-helix structure is replicated in the present novel in the form of two narratives from two different temporal locations: the contemporary and if you will the fundamental narrative woven around Piya's arrival at the tide country and her research on river dolphins; and the distant narrative centering on the incidents in the island of Morichjāpi. One may even view the contemporary narrative as a frame narrative that envelops and holds together the other narrative: the distant narrative is, so to say, embedded in the contemporary narrative. These two intertwined narratives in the helix may be interpreted as reproducing, in the structure of the text, the two features of the Sundarbans geography—the 'land' and the 'water'. The contemporary narrative, in enveloping and framing the other one, must necessarily parallel the dynamic and irresistible water bodies of the Sundarbans that invade and then recede from the landmass twice everyday. The use of words like 'embedded', 'frame' and 'invade' should not be taken to suggest that there exists, between the two features of the Sundarbans geography as well as between the two narratives, a structure of power, domination or hierarchy. On the contrary, the two narratives share a dialogic, or to use a word borrowed from the surrounding topography, 'symbiotic' relationship.

For instance, Nirmal's narrative is resoundingly silent as regards the fates of Kusum during the raid and Nirmal after the raid on the island of Morichjāpi. These gaps are filled up by Nilima in the later narrative. Again, Horen helps fill up a crucial gap in Nirmal's narrative when he tells Kanai that the night before the killing, Kusum had given Horen "proof of her love—all that a man might need" (364). Interestingly, both these characters are also present in Nirmal's narrative in a substantial way. On the other hand, Kanai's genuine appreciation of the scale of Nilima's achievement vis-à-vis the relative failure of Nirmal, his mature understanding of the issues involved in conservation, and his realization that "at Garjontola I learnt how little I know of myself and of the world" (353) are made possible by his reading of Nirmal's narrative. The experience of reading his uncle's text enriches his understanding of the past, the critical history of the tide country, the legends in circulation and the place of the outsider in the Sundarbans. The frame narrative has interesting connections with the embedded narrative, especially from the point of view of romance developing between characters. In both, there is a triad each—Fokir, Piya and Kanai, and Nirmal, Kusum and Horen—and, in both, the educated urbanite falls in love with the rustic. The difference is that while Nirmal in the embedded narrative is old and a male, Piya in the frame narrative is a young female. Finally, both the narratives are connected through the phenomenon of the tiger. In a way, the inhabitants' experience of burning a tiger in the contemporary narrative may be read as an attempt at exorcising the ghosts of the eviction in the distant narrative. The dialogic and non-hegemonic nature of this relationship also allows for the presence of other narratives like the one relating to Kanai's first visit to Lusibari. After all, the geography of the Sundarbans is not trapped within a binary model of the land and the water. Significantly, there are other intermediate stages between the water and the land, like the one exemplified by 'mud'. In many ways, mud is the essence of the tide country, its topography, its landscape, its in-between situation, and the syncretic practices.

As a teller of stories, Nirmal conceives of the Sundarbans as a myth and always likes to compare it with the deep time of geology where changes occur in terms of large scales of time like 'yugas' and epochs. Like a typical townsman, he thinks that the jungles of the tide country not only resist change, they arrest the onward march of time by making it stand still. Post-retirement, his close involvement

with the Morichjāpi settlers and his travels across the tide country open him up to the shifting nature of the landscape and the lifestyle of the people that bring about a radical change in his outlook. Following Rilke—‘life is lived in transformation’—Nirmal begins to believe that “in the tide country, transformation is the rule of life” (224). Nirmal discovers, contrary to his earlier opinion, that in the Sundarbans, rivers stray from week to week, forests and islands are made and unmade twice in a single day, married women put on the appearance of widows routinely to stave off any impending threat to their marriages, and history is written and erased without leaving behind any footprints. Transformation is the rule of life not only for the settlers, it is also the code that guides the characters of Ghosh’s narrative, especially the two outsiders.

One of the characteristic features of the Sundarbans is the ‘mohona’, a confluence of many channels of water, some or most of which are rivers in their own right. “(A)t these confluences, the water stretches to the far edges of the landscape and the forest dwindles into a distant rumour of land, echoing back from the horizon” (7). From the centre of a typical mohona surrounded by expansive sheets of water on all sides, it is almost impossible to identify the various channels of water and the contribution of each to the mohona. This exclusive topographical feature of his setting is reinscribed by Ghosh as the dominant narrative principle of his text. The two principal narratives, which constitute the double helix structure of the novel, are so organically woven into each other that past and present unproblematically flow into each other. *The Hungry Tide* actually goes beyond these two parallel narratives: in replicating the metaphor of the mohona, the novel becomes a virtual confluence where stories from the past and the present, multiple histories, shifting perspectives, emotions and images flow into a continuum.

The trope of stories and story-telling (mainly oral) has been a dominant one in Indian Writing in English. Actually speaking, this can be seen as a trope across the broad postcolonial spectrum that includes Latin American novelists such as Marquez. Beginning with Raja Rao and meandering its way through the works of Narayan, the figure of the story-teller climaxes in Rushdie’s Saleem Sinai of *Midnight’s Children* fame and the tradition of oral rendition in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* by the same

writer. Ghosh too uses this strategy of narration as has been discussed already. Zindi in *The Circle of Reason* is a mesmerizing teller of tales who attracts audiences like iron fillings to a magnet and in whose oral rendition, the same story takes on different contours; and Tridib in *The Shadow Lines* is fond of telling stories while his own relationship with May is framed in terms of Tristan and Isolde story. In *The Hungry Tide*, Nirmal is a dreamer and a story-teller who “hunted down facts in the way a magpie collects shiny things” and “somehow they did become stories—of a kind” (283). He is fond of telling mythical stories of Ganga’s birth and descent, geological stories of the Tethys Sea and the rise of the Himalayas, and more recent tales from colonial India such as the destruction of Port Canning by the Matla River. His narrative, written across two nights, is framed by the *Thousand and One Nights* while Nirmal feels “like some misplaced, misgendered Scheherazade . . . trying to stave the night off with a flying, fleeting pen” (148). Interestingly, his nephew Kanai adopts his uncle’s posture and narrative style to narrate to Piya a story which he has heard as child from him:

Kanai held up a finger and pointed it to the heavens, ‘All right then, comrades, listen: I’ll tell you about the Matla River and a storm-struck *matal* and the *matlami* of a lord who was called Canning. *Shono, kaan pete shono*. Put out your ears so you can listen properly.’ (283)

Kanai’s story is one of the many stories in the text that form a complex network. Beginning with the story of the settlement of the tide country by the Sir Daniel Hamilton to the story of brutal eviction of the settlers, the stories strategically incorporate different perspectives and worldviews. Apart from the individual points of view of characters, these stories help contextualize larger perspectives of history, myth, culture, nature, displacement, livelihoods of communities and conservation practices. *The Hungry Tide* is, as said, a virtual confluence of stories, each interconnected to one another like the different parts of a thriving ecosystem.

As an ethnographic narrative, *The Hungry Tide* comes in the wake of *In An Antique Land*, a remarkable book based on the factual account of Ghosh’s stay in an Egyptian village undertaken as part of his doctoral research. James Clifford, who wrote a highly favourable review of Ghosh’s book in *London Review of Books*, recommends it for its non-hegemonistic attempt to study the anthropological data and

material available to the anthropologist, an Egyptian village in the case of Ghosh. The book, that has a substantial presence of the ethnographer/anthropologist as one of the *dramatis personae*, shows a movement away from the colonial style of anthropology. When asked in an interview about Clifford's assessment of his book, Ghosh replies:

I'm not a theoretically minded person at all, but the reason why I stopped doing anthropology, and I *knew* I had to stop as soon as I finished my PhD, was precisely because anthropology was creating a kind of hegemonic voice. . . . when Jim Clifford says it's non-hegemonic, it's true, I think that *is* what it is, but that's not what I had in mind. I just had in mind trying to represent my own experience as truthfully as I possibly could. (Chambers, "Absolute" 29)

Any perceptive reader of *In An Antique Land* will testify that Ghosh, the anthropologist, is as much an object of study for the villagers as they are for him. As a follower of the Hindu faith, Ghosh becomes for them a curious and peculiar object because of the religious practices—worship of cows, burning of the dead—of the Hindus. Throughout his stay, he is pestered with questions relating to these two practices. It leads to that remarkable scene where Ghosh and the village Imam, “delegates from two superseded civilizations,” engage in a shrill argument, “vying with each other to establish a prior claim to the technology of modern violence” (*Antique* 236).⁹⁸ As both Clifford and Ghosh himself have said, the voice of the ethnographer/anthropologist in *In An Antique Land* is non-hegemonic and non-authoritarian. In *The Hungry Tide*, which can be seen as an ethnographic text also, Ghosh returns to the role of the ethnographer. Unlike the earlier text, the text in question is fictional and Ghosh is not any more accessible to those who form a part of his ethnographic material. The ethnographer is now an all-powerful narrator in control of not only the characters and the setting, but also of their histories, myths and syncretic practices. Yet, the narratorial or the authorial voice remains non-hegemonic. And this is primarily because the incorporation of stories as diverse narratives allows Ghosh's novel to accommodate various points of view and multiple voices thereby tempering the ethnographic slant of the narrative that is always in potential danger of accommodating only one hegemonistic point of view. The narrative is quite unlike colonial ethnographical models where the ethnographer/anthropologist's gaze is directed at his material in such ways that they invariably and inevitably end up

producing types. In *The Hungry Tide* and also in *In An Antique Land*, Ghosh's gaze is directed in a manner that the representation of ethnographic material produces individuals, not types.

The discussion above may carry the sense that Ghosh's novel is a typecast one from a postcolonial location that revels in the oral rendition of its narrative. Reviewers of the novel have even suggested that the novel carries flavours and cadences of the Bengali language to the extent that it reads like a translation from original Bengali.⁹⁹ However, the above discussion requires some nuanced qualifications. The thrust in Ghosh's text is not simply on the orality of stories and the oral rendition of the narrative. Peculiarly, this thrust is shifted to a strategic incorporation of stories within an essentially realistic framework. We see this happening in *The Shadow Lines* also, but it employs a technique that is only ostensibly realistic. In this novel, Ghosh carries on the strain of realism with which he experimented in *The Glass Palace*. In centering on an animal or animals and the man-animal conflict, *The Hungry Tide* closely approximates Melville's nineteenth-century epic *Moby Dick* to which there is an intertextual reference:

‘I thought you were going to lead to my Moby Dick,’ said Kanai. ‘But these are just little floating pigs.’ Piya laughed. ‘Kanai—you’re talking about a cousin of the killer whale.’ (304)

Moreover, Piya's pet species *Orcaella brevirostris*, a cousin of the killer whale, reminds us of Ahab's whale from Melville. In both, the man-animal/nature conflict enjoys a centrality that sustains interest in both the texts. However, despite these obvious similarities, both the novels are fundamentally different because Ghosh, quite unlike Melville, deliberately refuses to vest his animals—be it tiger, orcaella or even crab—with any trace of symbolism. The strain of realism and the reality checks that Ghosh brings in the narration of the Bon Bibi legend can also be discerned in the evocation of the animals. Shorn of any overt or covert symbolism, he adopts a plain and straightforward realistic style to depict the behaviour of animals.

As a novelist, Ghosh had every reason and excuse at his disposal not to adopt the style he finally does. Apart from the symbolism of predecessors like Melville's whale and Hemingway's marlin, there is a recent but quite well-established tradition

in IWE of the use of magic realism, a technique that Ghosh sparingly employs in his first novel. Moreover, the narrative seems to be a fit case for symbolic representation because there are superstitions and prohibitions: Piya's pet species is believed to be Bon Bibi's messengers by the tide country people; and a taboo prohibits the use of the word 'bagh' because to name it is to call it. The novel also has its share of religion and syncretic practices that are generally amenable to symbolic representation. Yet, Ghosh adopts a narrative strategy that is akin to documentary filmmaking. His detailed descriptions of the dolphins' behaviour, tempered with the scholarly use of technical terminology relating to boats and Piya's instruments, create an almost visual picture of Ghosh filming the creeks and channels of the tide country with the help of his equipment.¹⁰⁰ The dorsal fins, the beady eyes, the bobbing up and down movements and the little grunting sounds of the dolphins; the shimmering golden coat, the tawny flickering eyes and the twitching of the tail of the tigers; and the clicking and clattering of the crabs are all so remarkably captured that they can vie with the lens of the camera for precision. The same precision is employed to describe the cyclone toward the end as well as Fokir's vocation of crab catching.

Following is reproduced a passage from the text rich in graphic and visual details that describes passengers getting off an overcrowded tide country boat and wading their way through thick mud:

On the boat, preparations for the crossing were already in train. The women had hitched up their saris and the men were rolling up their *lungis* and trousers. On stepping off the plank, there was a long-drawn-out moment when each passenger sank slowly into the mud, like a spoon disappearing into a bowl of very thick *daal*; only when they were in up to their hips did their descent end and their forward movement begin. With their legs hidden from sight, all that was visible of their struggles was the twisting of their upper bodies. (24-5)

In the movement of only the torsos of the passengers, there is something very akin to dance like movements and it immediately reminds the reader of two different dance scenes from Ghosh which also have descriptions of similar movements and which come straight out of his diaries.¹⁰¹ This passage, that describes an almost daily routine in the lives of the inhabitants, is an instance of the lived experience to which both the

outsiders are witness. This quality of documentary filmmaking, so transparently visible in the passage quoted above, is one of the most outstanding qualities of Ghosh's narration. It is this quality that makes Ghosh's evocation stand out from, say, that of Rushdie, who visualizes the same setting of the Sundarbans in *Midnight's Children* as "incomprehensibly labyrinthine salt-water channels overtowered by cathedral-arching trees" (459):

(I)n the last light there could be no doubt that the jungle was gaining in size, power and ferocity; the huge stilt-roots of vast ancient mangrove trees could be seen snaking about thirstily in the dusk, sucking in the rain and becoming thicker than elephants' trunks, while the mangroves themselves were getting so tall that . . . the birds at the top must have been able to sing to God. (459-60)

While Rushdie's magic realist description makes the Sundarbans mysterious, *The Hungry Tide* renders it comprehensible through the alliance of realism with features of documentary filmmaking.

We could call this narrative technique documentary realism. This technique, that is basically a realistic mode of portrayal, is shorn of realism's nineteenth-century Victorian moorings and is wedded to documentary features. The graphic precision of documentary filmmaking gives this technique a dimension of photographic accuracy and makes, for want of a better word, a truthful portrayal. Moreover, in this technique, the subjectivity of the narrator remains, to the extent possible, uninfluenced by any consideration other than the task of faithfully portraying the material at hand. The narrative, naturally, has to be transparent and capable of representing the reality. This makes documentary realism the preferred mode of narration for a narrative like *The Hungry Tide* because it deals with the wretched living conditions and the suffering of a community living on the fringes of the nation. The moot question is: Does the use of documentary realism, in any way, signal a break with the earlier narratives of Ghosh?

In the first four major works till *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) Ghosh's texts invariably embody a high degree of postmodern self-reflexivity that not only draws attention to the constructed nature of the texts, but also calls into question the character of representation. A critical engagement with colonialism and the urge to

write back to some of the colonial discourses would definitely have contributed to Ghosh's choice. *The Glass Palace*, dealing with a critical period in the colonial history of the region, came as a surprise with its mainstream, nineteenth-century Victorian realism (see the preceding chapter). The features that marked the narration of Ghosh's earlier texts—self-reflexivity, questions regarding the representational character of narratives, features that point to the constructed nature of the text etc.—are absent from the present one. The narrative comes across as a luminous, transparent whole grounded in the confidence that it can reflect the reality on the ground, out there. This is best exemplified in the metaphor of translation in the text. Translation involves a dialogue across two languages and, by extension, across two cultures posited or grounded in the belief that translation across linguistic and cultural boundaries is possible. There are many levels and many instances of translation in the text, but we could refer to only two. Rilke wrote his *Duino Elegies* in German and it was later translated into English. Nirmal reads Buddhadeva Basu's Bengali translation, incorporates them into his narrative and these lines are supposedly again translated as they form part of Ghosh's narrative. As an interpreter, Kanai's position in the Piya-Fokir relationship is crucial because one does not understand the language of the other. Yet Kanai is not indispensable as they seem to understand each other perfectly well as cultural and linguistic barriers melt in the Sundarbans. This effortless, non-self-reflexive translation across barriers is a highlight of Ghosh's narrative. For ecocritics, this reverting back to a confidence in the transparent nature of representation must be music to the ears as it satisfies their clarion call of back to a realistic narrative mode of representation. Section I of this chapter concludes that for the ecocritics, nature is neither an abstraction nor a text nor a construct. For them, nature is something physical, material and elemental, that antedates and will outlast culturally coded determinants (Tucker 505). The ecocritics are skeptical of much postmodern theory because by problematising the whole issue of representation, much postmodern theory has called into question the status of representation in a realistic narrative. Dana Phillips' critique of ecocriticism, centered on ecocritics' skepticism of theory, also contends that the ecocritics' call of back to realism is underpinned by the question of representation. Thus, ecocritics might cheer that Ghosh's use of documentary realism, underpinned by the confidence in the representational power of the narrative, has actually been dictated by the ecocritical slant of the novel.

Does it mean that Ghosh has settled the representational question for once and all? Does it imply that *The Hungry Tide* marks a break from the past? Though the answers to the above questions may seem to be in the positive, we cannot for sure claim that Ghosh has laid to rest the question of representation. It is anyway too large a question to be dismissed in so summary a fashion. Here, one is reminded of strategic essentialism, a term used by Spivak to defend the charges of essentialism leveled against Said. Ghosh is indulging in some sort of strategic essentialism in keeping the question of representation in abeyance. While ecocritics can think and rejoice that Ghosh chooses the technique of documentary realism because of nature (the Sundarbans) and its representation, there must have been, perhaps, other far more important concerns that dictate Ghosh's choice. The ethnographic material that includes the food, customs and religious practices of the inhabitants must be one such concern. As discussed in some of the foregoing paragraphs, documentary realism is the most preferred narrative technique for the representation of such material. The immediacy of the suffering of the tide country people and the urgency of issues related to development must be another. In an interview given to *Outlook* (19 August 2002) after 9/11 and the Gujarat riots of 2002, Ghosh raises serious doubts about the category of development that is otherwise seen as offering solutions to social problems like riots. Not surprisingly perhaps, he is open to the view that rather than being the solution to social conflict, development—especially one particular variety—may actually be viewed as the problem (Reddy). The context in which Ghosh makes his observations (the Gujarat riots of 2002) and the context of his novel are certainly different. But, both the contexts complicate the category of development, especially one particular variety that has become a monolith, a master code or a master narrative of progress. Though Ghosh clarifies by saying that he didn't mean it in a general sense, a substantially large body of work of many Indian scholars on environment like Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil do not really look at development as offering a solution to many social problems. As they have consistently argued, development is always at the cost of someone else, mostly tribals, dalits and other poor and marginalized communities. In an article in *Interventions*, Robert Cribb very succinctly sums up this particular aspect of conservationist practices:

Whereas the antagonism between conservation and capitalism has at times been muted, a separate conflict between conservation and human

rights has become more acute. The conflict is based on the compelling argument that conservationist measures invariably focus on areas which have been relatively unaffected by development. These areas are often those parts of the globe where indigenous peoples are struggling to preserve their livelihoods and cultures against external encroachment. In a host of cases across the world, the creation of national parks and the protection of endangered species have both excluded indigenous peoples from regions they have occupied and managed for centuries, and hampered them from using natural resources as an economic base from which to seek modernity. (50)

Seen thus, the larger issues of conservation and development not only lend a poignancy to the suffering of the tide country people, but also vest them with an immediacy and urgency that actually can be seen to dictate the choice of documentary realism as the narrative strategy in Ghosh's novel. *The Hungry Tide*, then, is neither a quintessentially ecocritical nor a quintessentially postcolonial text. The form, the structure, the narrative strategy and the issues dealt with posit *The Hungry Tide* as an exemplar of postcolonial ecocriticism conscious of larger issues of environmentalism and development.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In his comprehensive review of the “Indian Novel in English of the 80s and 90s,” Jon Mee comments: “Perhaps the most sustained response to the opportunities created by Rushdie’s precedent has come in Amitav Ghosh’s fiction” (“After” 131). This enthusiasm about Ghosh is shared by R. K. Dhawan: “Amitav Ghosh is perhaps the finest writer among those who were born out of the post-*Midnight’s Children* revolution in Indian English fiction” (“Introduction” 11). It is significant to note here that the above comments were made before the publication of *The Glass Palace* in 2000. In other words, Ghosh has added three major novels to his body of creative work since these comments were articulated only vindicating the statements. Priyamvada Gopal, in a preview article in *The Hindu* written after Ghosh’s most recent novel *Sea of Poppies* was short listed for the Man Booker Prize, shares an equally emphatic endorsement of the novelistic career of Ghosh:

If Rushdie can be said to have revitalised the Indian novel in English with the 1981 publication of the indisputably magnificent *Midnight’s Children*, Ghosh’s fiction has, over the years, pushed at the boundaries of the genre, probed its unlit corners, and brought it into powerful dialogue with other places, peoples and times. Rather than settle into a predictable house style with a much-used box of tricks to hand, Ghosh has chosen to set new literary challenges for himself, constantly transforming his work over the years. (www.hindu.com)

Gopal’s comment vindicates, in more ways than one, the present study of the diverse narrative techniques employed by Ghosh. The major objective of the present study was a discussion of the diverse narrative strategies used by Ghosh so as to identify the means by which he collapses many discrete boundaries. By way of offering some general conclusions on Ghosh’s work in the light of the analyses in the previous chapters, this chapter will attempt a reappraisal of Ghosh’s position as a novelist, especially his location within IWE.

Ghosh is a serious novelist who grapples with contemporary issues of concern. We have already seen that some of his novels have a decidedly postmodern stance,

the most visible being his tendency to consistently spill over generic boundaries. However, his novels are also marked by an earnestness that help his fiction elude the weightlessness and banality that is said to generally accompany a quintessentially postmodernist text. His fiction engages with issues that are at the vanguard of contemporary intellectual debates. Mee very rightly says that “Ghosh is a writer concerned with India’s place in larger international cultural networks, whose fiction seems directly informed by contemporary academic debates about colonialism and culture” (“After” 131). Early on, in *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh is seen grappling with the issue of nationalism and national borders. Throughout that period, nationalism was a pet theme with many novelists of IWE and a dominant and defining issue of postcolonial criticism. In his highly influential and thought-provoking essay of 1986, Fredric Jameson argues that all third-world literature “are necessarily . . . allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as national allegories, even when, or perhaps, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel” (“Third” 69). Jameson’s contention that all third-world texts are national allegories has been challenged and contested, most notably by the Marxist critic Aijaz Ahmad (*In Theory* 95-122). In Ahmad’s opinion, Jameson’s rhetoric of otherness is primarily based on a strict binary division of the first world and the third world that runs dangerously close to a typical colonialist framing of third-world literature. Moreover, in Jameson’s easy identification of third-world literature as national allegory, Ahmad detects a strong tendency to homogenize that elides differences within the many literatures that constitute third world literature. At any rate, Jameson’s intervention pushed the category of the nation into the centre of the then current discourse of postcolonialism. The discussion of *The Shadow Lines* in chapter 3 posits the novel as a critique of the ideology of nationalism that is based on a strict binary whereby space and people outside the national borders are homogenized into the other. Ghosh’s novel undermines the monolith of the nation by reading heterogeneity into its alleged homogeneity, thereby implicating the national and the cultural other in the self. In refusing to read the nation as a parable or an allegory in terms framed by Jameson, Ghosh articulates a response from within the creative space of IWE that connects well with critiques articulated from the discursive space. With *In An Antique Land* Ghosh moves beyond the national paradigm as he attempts to recover a piece of subaltern

history that was informed by the practices of the Subaltern Studies collective, most of the members of which were his friends and contemporaries.

The experiment to retrieve the subaltern history and consciousness continues with *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Subalternity and the subaltern subject are given new directions in this novel because they are now bound up with the larger question of how the colonized societies reacted in the wake of introduction of modernity and science through the colonial encounter. It is no more a question of only the retrieval of the subaltern; it gets tied up with contemporary debates on the sociology of science in colonized societies that focused on native contributions to the dissemination of modern science in colonial contexts. Ghosh broaches this subject in his debut novel, but *The Calcutta Chromosome* is remarkable for its engagement with, and a subversive rewriting of, the genre of science fiction. Ghosh shifts to a different concern again in *The Hungry Tide* when he incorporates within a fictional form, the burning issues regarding ethics of conservation and what do they mean for third-world societies and communities. Most of the resistance movements against development and conservation that India has witnessed as a developing country are centered on displacement of communities and loss of livelihood. They are brought about because of direct government/state interventions for purposes such as building big dams and for animal and nature conservation. The whole question of development vis-à-vis indigenous 'underdeveloped' communities has been at the vanguard of contemporary debates. Through the fictional creation of a scene of burning of a tiger in *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh is able to directly connect to contemporary issues that are related to the livelihood and survival of fringe and peripheral communities, even when the geographical territories they inhabit are claimed by the nation to which they belong only tangentially.

One of the most significant and important interventions made by Ghosh's creative work, that concurs with and contributes to contemporary intellectual discourse, has been the compelling argument that globalization is not a recent phenomenon that largely attends the postmodern condition. As has been discussed in the context of *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh is interested in teasing out the roots of contemporary globalizing trends in the history of colonialism. In Ghosh's

novels, the large-scale transfer of labour and capital, that is an essential feature of contemporary globalization, is implicated in the structures of colonial capitalism. In the Introduction to a recent volume on postcolonial studies, the editors draw attention to a recent trend of “apparent eclipse of postcolonial studies by globalizing studies” (Loomba et al. 8). “The key question,” in their opinion,

is whether postcolonial studies can assert a specific method, interest, or political insight that can illuminate issues either ignored, marginalized, or depoliticized within the discussion of globalization. (8)

Concurring with most of the contributors to the volume, the editors “think of postcolonial studies as a critical strain posed within and against, as well as antecedent to, dominant notions of globalization” (8). The tendency to elide historical and material signifiers is a marked feature of globalization. Through an easy conflation of postmodernism with postcolonialism, globalization proffers the idea of a globe where spatial, temporal and material differences are leveled out in a great continuum. Ghosh’s fiction consistently challenges such powerful notions, such master narratives, by implicating globalization in the processes of colonial modernity. In IWE, there is definitely no better instance when the creative output of a writer enjoys a dialogic relationship with the contemporary discursive practices. In so doing, Ghosh’s fiction collapses the boundary between the ‘creative’ and the ‘discursive’. It is as if the creative is articulated through the discursive and vice versa.

Ghosh is often hailed as the most “scholarly practitioner” of the novelistic form in IWE.¹⁰² Rukmini Bhaya Nair, in her article on *The Glass Palace*, remarks on this aspect of Ghosh as an indicator of a trend in contemporary novel:

It strikes me that many PhD theses are not half as diligently worked out as Ghosh’s book, and the scholarship in them displayed to far less advantage than in *The Glass Palace*. The truth is that the contemporary novel—and Ghosh’s talent—have both matured to a stage where they can absorb a very rich diet of historical detail without necessarily running the risk of a bilious reader. (“Road” 168)

In novel after novel, Ghosh displays a penchant for scholarship and knowledge that is overwhelmingly historical. *Sea of Poppies*, with its mid-nineteenth-century colonial background and the voyage across the Indian Ocean, confirms the contention that in

Ghosh historical knowledge outweighs all other forms of knowledge.¹⁰³ A fair share of the credit for this has to go to the discipline he hails from—Anthropology—and to the anthropologist in him. A Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from Oxford, Ghosh typically brings to his vocation a historian's sharp eye for detail and an anthropologist's keen sense of recording and representing cultural practices. While this gives him a certain disciplinary edge, it makes the overall situation intriguing because anthropology itself has had a chequered colonial history in helping frame native communities and tribes as types. In a way, this runs counter to the spirit that informs his oeuvre because much of his work challenges and deconstructs the construction of natives as colonial types. For sure, Ghosh has, by his own admission, “stopped doing anthropology” “precisely because anthropology was creating a kind of hegemonic voice” (Chambers “Absolute” 29). Ghosh practises a different kind of anthropology, a sort of new Anthropology, which has been very favourably and enthusiastically received by leading anthropologists like Clifford, among others. At any rate, Ghosh's disciplinary background and his continuing association with academia help create a distinctive place for him in IWE.

Ghosh may have abandoned the practice of anthropology, yet it is a fact as clear as daylight that his anthropological background provides him with material to write novels. From the presentation of an expatriate community of different nationalities in his first novel to the recreation of the opium trade in nineteenth-century colonial India in his latest novel, Ghosh's narratives are replete with very diligently researched data. Sometimes the research threatens to swamp the whole narrative. When asked about the “balance between the researched data and the felt experience” in his novels, Ghosh replies that “any novel, whether it is a historical novel or anything else, is fundamentally based upon characters”:

What makes a novel powerful, what makes it strong, what wins readers for it in the end is the same: story—whether it is a historical novel or whether it is any other kind of novel, it is the characters, the emotions. (Kumar, ““Postcolonial”” 100-01)

In itself, Ghosh's comment is not remarkable. Conventionally understood, the storyline, events, characters, and their predicaments are the elements that classically constitute a novel. Ghosh's comment is important because it reveals that he is

essentially a novelist whose interest lies in the narrative. It is primarily because he brings the perspective of the novelist to bear upon his anthropological data that the latter are never allowed to subsume the narrative. He never sacrifices his narrative in favour of his data. Therefore, despite the presence of substantial researched data in Ghosh's narratives, the novels are accessible to the readers as works of fiction and do not suffer from a high-brow distancing that many novels of Rushdie perhaps do. It is the strategic incorporation of anthropological material into his narratives that occasions interest in his fiction and also help secure a distinctive space in IWE. As the anthropological material differs from novel to novel, this study has attempted an analysis of the diverse narrative techniques employed.

Ghosh's anthropological background and his critical engagement with history also help position him within IWE. Ghosh is no respecter of generic boundaries and his work has been extremely difficult to categorize. While this can be said to be true of a large body of Indian novels in English, Ghosh deserves a pride of place. As this study has shown, Ghosh not only does it consistently across his novels, he does it by employing different narrative techniques in each case. *The Calcutta Chromosome* offers the ultimate example of a novel that challenges the generic boundaries. Ghosh not only cherishes but also champions this position of generic fuzziness as is evident from one of his interviews: "The interesting thing is that, in India, historians aren't really historians and writers aren't really writers, there's a kind of fuzziness about these things" (Silva and Tickell 217). Ghosh comes back to this fuzziness again in his interview with Chambers when he says that "disciplinary boundaries never had for us the kind of absoluteness they have in the West" ("Absolute" 34). While Ghosh cannot be faulted for saying what he says, his comments may also be seen as an attempt at clearing the ground for his own novelistic practices. The comments are a vindication of his creative praxis. Part of Ghosh's importance and significance as a novelist results from this shuttling between generic boundaries, between fact and fiction, between the past and the present and between different geographical spaces. Thus, Ghosh's position within IWE can be seen to rest on three significant features of his work: his anthropological background, the collapsing of generic boundaries, and a critical engagement with history. Yet, this does not help us in reassessing Ghosh's distinctive location within IWE mainly because there is a substantial body of IWE

that can lay claim to at least the last two features, if not all the three. Therefore, this reassessment has to be done in the context of Ghosh's experiments with narrative strategy, which the present study has discussed.

"It has been said of Amitav Ghosh that he never writes the same novel twice" (Khair, *Amitav* vii). The foregoing study of Ghosh's fiction has attempted to show that Ghosh never uses/writes the same narrative twice. It is the use of diverse narrative techniques and an eagerness to experiment with the form of the novel that vest Ghosh's works with a distinctiveness of their own. From his first novel to the latest, he has consistently experimented with different narrative techniques. *The Circle of Reason*—part picaresque, part bildungsroman and, part detective story—employs the magic realist strain sparingly. The circular and cyclical narrative technique of the novel creates a kind of fuzziness between the categories of science/reason and passion. *The Shadow Lines* replicates the nature of memory as it works towards a continuum where the past and the present collapse into each other, and stories dwell with other stories. *The Calcutta Chromosome* makes immense capital out of silence and absence as it playfully teases around with the genre of science fiction. It problematises a whole set of categories and notions, including that of discovery and knowledge. *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide* employ different shades of realism to suit the demands of the content.

This constant experiment in narrative techniques has significantly contributed to the broadening of the horizon of novels in IWE. The field of IWE has been mapped for quite sometime on the binary of realistic/magic realist: *Midnight's Children* as a quintessentially magic realist text occupies one extreme whereas the realism of *A Suitable Boy* (1993) is positioned at the other end of the spectrum. Other novels could be plotted on this axis and classed according to their relative distance from the nearest pole. Beginning with *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh strives to offer alternative narratives and narrative strategies. Both *The Shadow Lines* and *The Calcutta Chromosome* force us to think beyond this dual axis. *The Shadow Lines*, especially, seems on the surface to be a realistic novel simply because it has no trace of magic realism so visible in its predecessor. But, as the analysis of this novel in chapter 3 suggests, the novel questions, challenges and resists the linearity that is so fundamental to a realistic

narrative. In a deliberately orchestrated way, it punctures the linearity that is quintessential to any realistic narration. It does not indulge in typical Rushdiean magic realist jugglery, yet *The Shadow Lines* is not a classic/mainstream realistic novel. It contests and resists the linearity of realist narration in far more significant ways than do magic realist novels. *The Calcutta Chromosome* also calls for an interpretive grid that can go beyond the realistic-magic realist paradigm. It has the spectral presence (or, shall we call it absence) of ghosts and elements of the fantastical that supply the dose of magic realism. Yet, the magic realist strain is not constantly dominant enough to class it as a typical novel of that genre. Moreover, the novel is also not realist. Both the novels, in very significant ways, offer a third space, a space that transcends the realistic-magic realist dialectic. The present study concludes that the experimentation with narratives and narrative techniques results in the creation of this third space, and is one of the ways by which Ghosh explores this space. This is one of Ghosh's fundamental and abiding contributions to broadening the parameters of the IWE.

The overt realism of *The Shadow Lines* points to a characteristic feature of the diverse narratives of Ghosh where he collapses the boundary from within. This basically is a deconstructive principle which Ghosh employs to undermine or deconstruct the world of his novels. Take for instance the discussion of discovery in the chapter on *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Discovery has a binary structure where the discoverer (always a human subject) corresponds to the left term of the binary whereas the discovered (mostly a non-human object) is the underprivileged. Now, Ghosh uses a narrative strategy that destabilizes the boundary within this binary thereby, collapsing the one into the other. This technique is repeated in the novel with the binary of science versus magic. The subaltern group led by Mangala is engaged in practices that are clearly a mix of the scientific and the magical. The chapter on *The Glass Palace* discussed the construction of Rajkumar's personality in ways that the boundary between colonizer and colonized collapse, thereby creating a continuum of sorts. It is as if the self and the other have collapsed into each other. In *The Hungry Tide*, the man-animal relationship makes for an interesting study. As regards the legend of Bon Bibi, the border dividing man from animal is insurmountable because it is cast in terms of conflict between man and animal, the latter being always the demon

in the guise of the 'tiger'. The whole question of animal conservation in the novel is thus, predicated upon the resolution or otherwise of this question. But, Ghosh does not allow this insurmountable problem to hijack the whole narrative. Instead, he introduces nuanced understanding of this relationship that destabilizes the border between man and animal. This is done through the character of Fokir, whose participation in the burning of the tiger is framed through his symbiotic relationship with the river dolphins, and vice versa.

The Shadow Lines, which begins with a family of natives as travellers, consistently challenges borders and boundaries. Apart from national and cultural boundaries, the novel, at a very fundamental level, collapses the internal boundaries from within. An instance is the friendship between the Datta-Chaudhuris and the Prices which Ghosh refuses to see in terms of the colonial binary logic. Through the act of physical consummation between May and the narrator at the end, the novel not only dissolves the hierarchical barriers, but, also offers a space for friendship and human relationships that is not mediated by the power structures of colonialism. The imagined gesture of stepping through the mirror that so many characters in the novel experience through different acts melts the boundaries between oneself and one's mirror image. This recurrent feature of Ghosh's novels where binaries are collapsed from within, essentially amounts to collapsing the self into its other. The self does not define itself in opposition to the other because the other is always already implicated in the self. Perhaps, this is Ghosh's way of writing back. His narratives are not reactionary because they do not alter the terms of the binary. Simply doing that would amount to nothing more than foisting another binary, with the underprivileged in the former usurping the space of the privileged. What he does is give the binary trap a slip. Ghosh's predilection for collapsing borders—generic, thematic, psychological, political—and exploring non-binary spaces ensure for him a distinct location within IWE.

There is another way in which the canvas of IWE is broadened by Ghosh's narratives. Space, imagined or geographical, is a recurrent trope in his novels and the ability of a character to negotiate and transcend space is a crucial indicator of the character's personality. The reified geographical space of nations with trenches and

wire fences marking borders is visualized essentially in terms of a vast transnational contiguous space where borders and boundaries dissolve into shadow lines. *The Glass Palace* offers the best example of how contiguous regions become reified national spaces through historical processes. The interesting aspect is Ghosh's choice of the geographical locations: the Gulf and northern Africa in *The Circle of Reason*; Egypt and the medieval Indian Ocean trade route in *In An Antique Land*; Burma and Southeast Asia in *The Glass Palace*; the Sunderbans in *The Hungry Tide*; and, the nineteenth-century Indian Ocean route to Mauritius islands in *Sea of Poppies*. While all these regions are non-Western spaces that have been left out of traditional narratives, they are not, in fact, given their due even in Indian novels written in English. In her review of *The Glass Palace*, Meenakshi Mukherjee rues the absence of literature on Burma and, in *The Hungry Tide* characters like Nirmal and Kanai are struck by their lack of knowledge about the Sundarbans that lie only a hundred kilometers from the metropolitan centre, Calcutta. Again, this can be traced back to the anthropologist within Ghosh who is interested in recovering and recreating regions that have traditionally gone unrepresented. By thus focusing on these lesser known and less written about geographical spaces, Ghosh opens up another new front for IWE. Again, the horizon of the IWE canvas is creatively broadened out.

The present study is designed as a focused analysis of the various narrative strategies employed by Ghosh that examines the choice of the techniques and the structures of the individual narratives. Studies such as this are necessarily limited in scope and reach. There always remain subjects, issues and areas that lie outside the scope of such studies. There definitely are possibly rewarding areas of enquiry and scope of further research that this study may have tangentially touched upon but not elaborated. One can point to more areas like the construction and representation of subalternity and the ideological perception of space and time in Ghosh. Some work has already been done in these areas but, nevertheless, more needs to be done. Just as this work is not exhaustive, the possible areas for further enquiry are also not exhaustive. Ghosh is an active writer and one can expect more experimentation from him in the future. For the time being, we can look forward to the sequel of *Sea of Poppies*. One sincerely hopes and believes that this study will be able to contribute

substantially to the growing body of literature on the work of Ghosh and, at the same time, inspire explorations into newer areas within Ghosh.

¹ In an interview, Ghosh mentions that the narrator was left unnamed “in deference to Proust,” especially his *Remembrance of Things Past* (Hawley, Amitav 9). Mukul Kesavan also leaves the narrator unnamed in his only novel *Looking through Glass* (1995). The last paragraph of *The Glass Palace* unexpectedly throws up an unnamed narrator. No one, it seems, has been interested in this little detail including, perhaps, the novelist himself.

² Apart from the many awards won by his novels, Ghosh has also bagged the 1999 Pushcart Prize, a leading literary award for stories, poems and essays published in the United States. He got the award for his essay “The March of the Novel through History: The Testimony of my Grandfather’s Bookcase” published in *The Kenyon Review* 20.2 (Spring 1998): 13-24. This essay was first published in *Kunapipi* 19.3 (1997): 2-13, and subsequently reprinted in *The Imam and the Indian: Prose Pieces* (2002) 287-304. He was also nominated for the American Society of Magazine Editors Award for Reporting in 1999 for *Countdown*, a commentary on the nuclear situation in India and Pakistan. Further, Ghosh’s novels have also been named as Notable Book of the Year by leading American newspapers: *The Circle of Reason* by *New York Times* in 1987; *In An Antique Land* by *New York Times* in 1993; and *The Glass Palace* by *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, and *Chicago Tribune* in 2001.

³ About the conflation of the consciousness and the central vision, Rajan says: “This is a novel that comes to us entirely filtered through a singular consciousness. . . . There is no suggestion of irony, resistant points of view, or other checks to the reach of this central vision” (297). In his book on Ghosh, Mondal takes issue with this view and offers a radical re-reading of the narrator’s construction of Ila’s sexuality from within the parameters of nationalistic male discourse. He finds that this reading opens up a gap between the narrator and the text which serves as “a space for a critique of the narrator himself” (167).

⁴ In his edited book on Ghosh, Khair published a paper entitled “Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome*: The Question of Subaltern Agency” that is based on the long chapter on the novel in *Babu Fictions*.

⁵⁵ Among other things, Ghosh speaks of the impact that Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* had on *The Shadow Lines*. He says: “Proust’s influence on *The Shadow Lines* is clearly evident I think, even in the structure of its sentences. Similarly, it was in deference to Proust that the narrator . . . was left unnamed. But Proust’s influence is evident also in the ways in which time and space are collapsed in the narrative. . . . I remember that at the time my 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”

(9). Ghosh also talks of some other ways in which Proust might have influenced his writing: “I think in retrospect that one of the reasons why Proust made such an impression was that his work seemed to me to represent an alternative modernism. Until then I had been exposed mainly to the Anglo-Irish-American variant of modernism, which is of course, deeply hostile to the narrative or representational impulse. Proust’s work on the other hand, offered many very interesting possibilities so far as narrative is concerned. And from the start of my writing life my fundamental engagement has been with narrative (indeed this was one of the reasons why I wanted to write fiction)” (8).

⁶ To add to this, one may point out that though Ghosh has consistently resisted being labelled a ‘postcolonial writer’, he is alive to the issues raised in this discipline. He even concedes that “commentators such as Bhabha have probably done something very interesting and important, which is that they’ve somehow ‘made’ writers” (Silva and Tickell 215). See, also, Ghosh’s interview with Banibrata Mahanta et al.

⁷ Opinions are divided as to whether Propp was a formalist or a structuralist. His Russian origin and unfamiliarity with Saussure’s formulations may qualify him to be a formalist. But then, early formalism was not favourably inclined to the study of narrative. Moreover, Propp’s *Morphology*, by common consent, is considered to be the first text in structuralist narratology. Hence, the term formalist-structuralist.

⁸ John Sturrock, in his book *Structuralism*, has alluded to this aspect of formalism/structuralism. The way Propp reduces more than hundred fairy tales into thirty-one functions and seven spheres of action is a case in point. At any rate ‘economy’ is one of the cardinal principles for a linguist, and this chapter will go on to show the extent to which narratology, particularly the structuralist variety, relied on foundational concepts of linguistics.

⁹ It was published in French under the title “La logique des possibles narratifs.” The eighth issue of *Communications* is a watershed in French structuralism as it had contributions by leading French structuralists like Todorov, Greimas and others with an “Introduction” by Roland Barthes. The model that Bremond presents in this article is further worked upon by him into a full book *Logique du récit* published in 1973.

¹⁰ It was originally published in French in 1969 as *Grammaire du Decameron*.

¹¹ The essay, entitled “Fabula and Sjuzhet in the Analysis of Narrative: Some American Discussions,” was published in a 1980 Special Issue *Poetics Today*. The paper was originally presented at *Synopsis 2: Narrative Theory and Poetics of Fiction*, an international symposium held in the Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv University in 1979.

¹² While defining plot, Forster remarks: “We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality” (116).

¹³ Actually, Genette discusses a three-fold division into ‘histoire’ ‘récit’ and ‘narration’, but, as Meike Bal has argued, it actually amounts to a binary division. Even Culler accepts Bal’s contention.

¹⁴ As a “term used in Linguistics, and especially in Generative Grammar,” universal refers “to a property claimed to be common for all languages, to demonstrate the validity of which is a main goal of linguistic theory” (Crystal 483).

¹⁵ The influence of formalism on structuralism has already been written about. Parallelism and Repetition are essentially formalist tools that are also indispensable tools for a structuralist critic. Actually, without showing parallelism and repetition, it is almost impossible to show the invariant elements in a text and across texts.

¹⁶ Presupposition, instead of ideological plank, might be a better term since structuralism flaunted itself as innocent of any ideological moorings.

¹⁷ In his “Introduction” to *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist writes: “It was in these years [i.e. the Stalinist Russia of the 1920s and 1930s] that Bakhtin wrote something on the order of nine large books on topics as major and varied as Freud, Marx and the philosophy of language. Only one of these (the Dostoevsky book) appeared under his own name during these years. Three others were published under different names ... some were partially lost during his forced moves; some disappeared when the Nazis burned down the publishing house that had accepted his large manuscript on the *Erziehungsroman*; some were ‘delayed’ forty-one years in their publication when journals that had accepted manuscripts were shut down, as happened to the *Russian Contemporary* in 1924; others, such as the Rabelais book, were considered too aberrant for publication, due to their emphasis on sex and body functions ...” (xv).

¹⁸ Actually, the individual authorship of the texts ascribed to these critics is debatable. Opinions are divided as to whether the texts published under the names of Vološinov and Medvedev (*Freudianism* and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* under Vološinov and *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* under Medvedev) were actually in part or in whole written by Bakhtin. A very well-known translator and editor of Bakhtin’s work, Michael Holquist, thinks “that ninety percent of the text of the three books in question is indeed the work of Bakhtin himself” (“Introduction” xxvi). Without in any way attempting to ascribe the authorship of the above-mentioned three disputed texts to Bakhtin, the discussion here shall primarily mention Bakhtin.

¹⁹ Northrop Frye, in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), articulated this position by locating the specifically “fictive” in the space between the “mythic” and the “historical”.

²⁰ The essay, first published in *Critical Inquiry* in 1985, actually predates Said’s reading of *Mansfield Park*. The contexts for both the essays are also different. Spivak basically posits the essay as a reaction to the dominant forms of Anglo-American feminism which celebrated Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* as a classic feminist text and the heroine as a proto-feminist.

²¹ In 1982, the Subaltern Studies collective began publishing radical historical accounts of the Indian subcontinent’s history under the title *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Based on a rigid theoretical demarcation between the categories of the ‘élite’ and the ‘subaltern’, it proposed a historiography different from the dominant Marxist and nationalist modes of historiography. The original editorial team comprised of Ranajit Guha, Shahid Amin, David Arnold, Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Pandey, Parthe Chatterjee, David Hardiman, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Sumit Sarkar. Some years back, the collective was officially dismantled. Nevertheless, the published volumes of *Subaltern Studies* along with independently published work of the subalternists are possibly the most

sustained and significant intervention made in the area of postcolonial studies in the last thirty years or so.

²² Amitav Ghosh contributed a scholarly article “The Slave of MS.H.6” to the seventh volume of *Subaltern Studies*. This article forms an integral part of, and partly occasions, Ghosh’s path breaking 1992 text, *In An Antique Land*.

²³ Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* (New Delhi: OUP, 1995) 3. All further citations are from this edition and have been acknowledged with page numbers in parenthesis.

²⁴ *The Shadow Lines* has a very interesting play on sex and gender. They seem to cut across and into each other. While the text valorizes two male characters in the narrator and Tridib and critiques two female characters in Ila and the grandmother, the principles valorized are essentially feminine while those critiqued are essentially masculine. The construction of gender and gendered identities in the novel have already elicited much critical response, most of which have been discussed in section II of Chapter 1 as part of ‘Review of Literature’. For more, one can refer to Suvir Kaul “Separation Anxiety”; Rajeswari Sunder Rajan “The Division of Experience”; Vinita Chandra “Suppressed Memory”; Neelam Srivastava “Fictions”; and Shameem Black “Cosmopolitanism at Home.”

²⁵ The phrase “grievously incomplete” has been used from the opening sentences of Sumit Sarkar’s textbook on Indian history, *Modern India 1885-1947* (1). In his oft-discussed essay “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History” Dipesh Chakrabarty refers to Sarkar’s opening remarks to begin his own argument (226).

²⁶ The expression is used in the novel for the grandmother whom Tridib thinks to be “a modern middle-class woman” minus “the self-deceptions that make up the fantasy world of that kind of person” (78). This becomes a crucial distinction between the grandmother and Ila because the latter’s “life is a series of self-deceptions” (Mukherjee, “Maps” 264).

²⁷ It is also true that she displays the other tendency, i.e., to homogenize.

²⁸ Chakrabarty selects a paragraph from Nirad Chaudhuri’s autobiography that describes the first wedding night. The paragraph, according to Chakrabarty, is the only one out of 963 pages that gives us a peep into the intimate private life of the autobiographer. Yet, the private realm is nearly shut out by expressions like “I do not remember” or “I do not know.” Chakrabarty reads this as a lack—“Public without private”—and an “instance of the ‘incompleteness’ of bourgeois transformation in India” (231-32).

²⁹ In the narrative, Tridib’s father goes on to become the High Commissioner at Dhaka. Moreover, his grandfather was a Justice during the Raj. Even his two brothers are very well placed. The elder Jatin who is Ila’s father, is a brilliant economist and has a job with the UN while the younger, Robi, is an IAS officer with the Indian Govt.

³⁰ The nature of this tutelage is predicated upon the axis of incomprehensibility that is a crucial determinant of Tridib’s personality. As such, the institution of middle-class education—with examinations at the centre—fails to come to terms with it. In fact, the pressure of examinations forces the family to delay breaking, to the narrator, the news of his grandmother’s death (92). At one level, the

novel is an unabashed critique of middle-class morality and some of the institutions and practices, and it minces no words while critiquing them.

³¹ The present argument on mirror image may be seen to carry echoes of Mukherjee's interpretation of it in her paper on *The Shadow Lines*. One may discover resonance of her paper in other parts of this chapter as well as her paper has attained a seminal status within the body of criticism on Ghosh's work. Mukherjee interprets the use of this image as a ploy to dissolve space and distance, that stretches "the narrative beyond mimetic realism to incorporate an element of mystery, a bafflement at the frontiers of knowing" ("Maps" 267). The attempt here is to look at the use of this image as a narrative strategy which debars certain characters from the privilege of narrating the narrative.

³² A N Kaul thinks that "the Prices are certainly over-priced" and that value has been attributed to them "for no apparent reason except that they are British" (308). Both agreeing and disagreeing with Kaul are difficult.

³³ In her discussion of the construction of nationalism through gender and the responses of different characters' to it, Neelam Srivastava remarks: "Ila, together with the grandmother, is probably the character who feels the most need to adhere to a received narrative, a reassuring master-myth, with a built in teleology that guarantees 'freedom' at the end of the road" ("Fictions" 83-84).

³⁴ It is important not to lose track of the fact that the grandmother's peculiar situation is typical of a vast population of the subcontinent whose nationality clash with the place of their birth. Ghosh seems to be particularly aware of this situation as the lineage of some of his characters suggest: Balaram in *The Circle of Reason* is born in pre-partition Dhaka but is a citizen of post-independence India; Piya in *The Hungry Tide* is born in India but is an American citizen. This play on nationality and one's place of birth takes on very different and interesting contours in *The Glass Palace*.

³⁵ On a number of occasions and in a number of interviews Marquez has admitted the seminal influence of his grandmother's storytelling power on his narrative art.

³⁶ George Basalla, "The Spread of Western Science," *Science* 156 (1967): 611-22. Basalla's three-stage evolutionary model for the spread of Western science consisted of 'contact' phase, 'colonial science' phase, and 'independent' phase. For a more elaborate discussion, including its premises and drawbacks, see Arnold *Science* 9-15; and Raina *Images and Contexts* 176-191.

³⁷ See, for instance, Deepak Kumar *Science and the Raj*; Gyan Prakash "Science Between the Lines"; Dhruv Raina *Images and Contexts*; S. Irfan Habib and Dhruv Raina "Copernicus, Columbus, Colonialism and the Role of Science in Nineteenth Century India" etc.

³⁸ Amitav Ghosh, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (Ravi Dayal: New Delhi, 1996) 47. All further citations from the text are from this edition and have been acknowledged with the abbreviation CC followed by the page number(s) in parenthesis.

³⁹ Amitav Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason* (Ravi Dayal: New Delhi, 1986) 280. All further citations from the text are from this edition and have been acknowledged with the abbreviation CR followed by the page number(s) in parenthesis.

⁴⁰ The magic realist strain has been one of the much talked of and written about aspects of Ghosh's first novel. See, for example, Stephanie Jones "A Novel Genre: Polylingualism and Magical Realism in

Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*"; Shyam S. Agarwalla "Magic Realism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*"; and Damodar Rao "Magic and Irony as Principles of Structure: A Reading of *The Circle of Reason*".

⁴¹ This understanding largely informs Anthony Burgess's review of the novel that appeared in *New York Times Book Review* (6 July 1986). It is one of the earliest reviews and one that helped establish Ghosh as a major voice in the postcolonial Indian English Fiction scene.

⁴² The inoculation of Joseph Meister, on the very day he was bitten by a stray dog, with Pasteur's still untested vaccine is regarded as a highpoint of Pasteur's career. It is also symptomatic of Pasteur's belief and spirit that carried him through many moments of crisis. This particular instance led to the discovery of Rabies vaccine and was widely acclaimed then, as the problem of children being bitten by stray dogs was rampant in most of the European nations.

⁴³ The positioning of an Oriental city as a site of discovery and purposive activity may be said to constitute a displacement of sorts. In the context of *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Anshuman Mondal calls such a positioning as a geographical displacement. Mondal's argument has been taken up in section IV of this chapter.

⁴⁴ When Balaram stood up to oppose Gopal in a meeting of the Rationalists, there is a reference to many members of the Rationalists having "publicly burnt every scrap of Lancashire cloth in their houses" (CR 48). Balaram's reply to Shombhu Debnath is marked by extensive references to the history of cloth-trade, the etymological root of the word 'cotton', the genesis of weaving etc. (CR 55-58). When Alu is in Calcutta for a brief period after fleeing Lalpukur, he is smuggled by Rajan, a member of "Kerala's great caste of Chalias", to see the insides of a cloth mill (CR 156).

⁴⁵ This is the case with an overwhelming majority of Hindu Indians technically referred to as 'caste Hindus'. The achievement of "India's ancient scientific traditions" is conventionally looked upon as "a history of precocious early achievement followed by subsequent decline and degeneration" (Arnold, *Science* 3). The advances made were in the fields of astrology, astronomy, mathematics, trigonometry, medicine, etc. Arnold refers to how the "Orientalist triptych—contrasting the achievements of ancient Hindu civilisation with the destruction and stagnation of the Muslim Middle Ages and the enlightened rule and scientific progress of the colonial modern age—has had a remarkably tenacious hold over thinking about the science of the subcontinent" (4). And, this schema was "deployed not only by British scholars, officials and polemicist but also by many Indians, for whom it formed the basis for their own understanding of the past and the place of science in Indian tradition and modernity" (4). The endeavour of Gopal-led Rationalists to rewrite some of the ancient Hindu texts in the light of the findings of modern science falls in pat with this "Orientalist triptych."

⁴⁶ This part of the argument largely draws from Claire Chambers's paper on *The Circle of Reason* ("Historicizing"). She extensively takes up the case studies of phrenology and criminology as pseudo-sciences and traces their short careers as sciences in the service of the Empire. She contends: "Forms of scientific knowledge, which were deemed to be irreconcilable with the rhetoric of western superiority, were labeled deviant or 'pseudo-scientific'" (41). By citing instances like Isaac Newton's belief in "such esoteric practices as alchemy and astrology" (41), and the non-acceptance by mainstream science

of the thesis of evolution as proposed by “inexpert yet enthusiastic proponents of evolution, such as Robert Chambers” (42), she argues that the “the borders between mainstream science and pseudo-science are more porous than is usually supposed” to be (41). By the same token, she opines that “Balaram’s attitude towards science evinces a hybridizing tendency” (43).

⁴⁷ G. J. V. Prasad considers *The Circle of Reason* as a narrative of quest that shows the novelist as “involved in this quest for narrative significance, in trying to find a place for himself and other human beings in the universe, and thus to re-order it” (56). Yumna Siddiqui considers the question of “the relationship between Enlightenment discourses of reason and the apparatuses of police in the postcolonial context” in the light of the genre of police fiction or detective fiction and Ghosh’s rewriting of these genres (176).

⁴⁸ Here, one can say that Louis Pasteur and his achievements resurface in Ross’s malaria research and his discovery. The resurfacing is indirect and somewhat incidental. *The Calcutta Chromosome* centres on malaria and the search for the malarial parasite. Malaria has been probably the most recalcitrant of all ‘tropical diseases’, and it offered sustained challenge to an important colonial institution— ‘tropical medicine.’ There is a well-accepted view that Pasteur’s Germ theory made the establishment and development of tropical medicine possible (Arnold, *Colonizing* 13).

⁴⁹ It means a person engaged to shovel shit (CC 63).

⁵⁰ After defining the traditionally-held role and position of the author, Foucault contests and negates such an idea that forms an integral part of the epistemology of the Enlightenment. Ghosh’s novel also challenges such authoritative constructions of individuality.

⁵¹ The term “counter-epistemology” is borrowed from John Thieme’s excellent essay on *The Calcutta Chromosome*. He employs it in the context of Mangala and her associates: “They involve a counter-epistemology, which promises a form of immortality through the erosion of Western conceptions of discrete subjectivity, through the dismantling of the shadow-lines that construct notions of autonomous selfhood” (“Discoverer” 136).

⁵² That *The Calcutta Chromosome* lacks a central character or a central incident is a point also made by Pramod Nayar in his reading of the novel. Nayar offers his reading around Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the ‘rhizome’, ties it up with other related concepts like synapse, routes etc., and finds that Ghosh’s text breaks down into “a continuous multiplicity” (“Ontology” 175).

⁵³ For most of the discoveries in medicine, including the vaccines, the object is living but non-human, whereas the site of discovery and experimentation is the human body. David Arnold has done pioneering work on the body and state medicine in colonial India where the body becomes the site of control of epidemic as well as resistance to strategies of Western medicine. About the friction between the colonial authorities and native communities as regards the implementation of plague measures in the last decade in nineteenth-century India, Arnold says: “It followed that government plague measures concentrated upon the interception, examination, and confinement of the body. This entailed a form of direct medical intervention that—at least until opposition became too troublesome to ignore—swept aside the rival or preferential claims of relatives and friends, of *vaidyas* and *hakims*, religious and caste leaders” (*Colonizing* 211). See also Arnold “Touching.”

⁵⁴Ramachandra Guha, in his highly interesting essay “An Anthropologist Among the Marxists”, talks about M. N. Srinivas’ formulation of successful ethnology as having three stages. “An anthropologist is ‘once-born’ when he initially goes to the field, thrust from familiar surroundings into a world about which he has very little clue. He is ‘twice-born’ when, on living for some time among his tribe, he is able to see things from their viewpoint” (*Anthropologist* 10). “(A)n anthropologist is truly ‘thrice-born’ only when at last he moves away from the field, back to the very different world of the university” (11). The present argument connects well with the second stage where the boundary between the anthropological subject and the anthropological object dissolves.

⁵⁵ This, in no way, should be taken to suggest that Ghosh effects a change *only* in the form while the content remains the same throughout. Far from it, each narrative of his offers new issues and subjects to grapple with.

⁵⁶ The names of Shelley and Wells might give rise to a misplaced notion that the genre of science fiction had an exclusively English birth and upbringing. Jules Verne, who had originally contributed the ideas of voyages under the sea in a submarine and in the space in a spaceship, had immense influence on the development of the genre. Both Wells and Verne “have been called ‘The Father of Science Fiction’” (Roberts 48).

⁵⁷ While agreeing that “the political ideologies and institutional structures that colonialism had put in place” must surely have negatively influenced the development of science in the colonies, Arnold reminds us that “it is important to recognise that science, technology and medicine were more than a colonial force. They were, and surely remain, aspects of a global hegemony” (*Science* 14-15).

⁵⁸ The poem is reproduced verbatim in the text from a marble plaque at the Ross memorial. When Murugan looked at it, he “began to declaim, from the same poem,” two more stanzas. Here, Ghosh has deliberately blurred the distinction between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ because Murugan’s riposte is his own creation, and does not form part of Ross’s poem (CC 34-35).

⁵⁹ In *The Circle of Reason*, whose central metaphor is the trope of weaving, Alu finds himself looking at the giant spinning machines inside a Calcutta cloth mill (CR 156). The description of the whole scene is tinged with the adversarial dichotomy of man and machine. Put in the larger context of the metaphor of weaving that permeates the novel, one may even look at this description as technology versus traditional forms.

⁶⁰ Bishnupriya Ghosh, drawing attention to the tantric practices in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, argues that as “the other of Brahminical Hinduism,” “tantric cults deploy desire, and therefore the body, as a means to freeing the soul” (130). In the notes to her essay, she further mentions that in “common Bengali lore,” Kali was often worshipped by “forest dwellers, ‘outlaws’,” and “dacoits” (136).

⁶¹ In commensurate with the depiction of religion in the novel, ‘Laakhan’ offers newer interpretations on the two great Indian epics. His name is a regional variant of ‘Lakshman’, the brother of the legendary Ram, King of Ayodhya and the hero of the epic *Ramayana*. Lakshman is a loyal brother, always second in line, who helps Ram rescue Sita from the clutches of the demon, Ravan. Laakhan is also faithful and second in line to Mangala. Eklavya, the archer in the *Mahabharata*, was also missing a thumb. Because he was from a low caste, Dronacharya, the royal guru of the Pandava Princes, denied

him education. However, he managed to learn archery and developed into a fine archer. One can only guess at the similarities between Laakhan and him.

⁶² This part of the discussion draws largely from Suchitra Mathur's paper.

⁶³ The full text of the letter is available in *The Book Review* XXV. 7 (July 2001). The letter was accessible on www.amitavghosh.com/cwprize.html#letter but the link is no longer active.

⁶⁴ Rajkumar's situation (stateless orphan) immediately connects him to Alu in Ghosh's first novel, who is also an orphan and a transnational. Rajkumar also partly evokes the child narrator in *The Shadow Lines* who is taught to cross national and cultural boundaries. All the children find themselves caught in moments when contemporary history unfolds.

⁶⁵ Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2000) 3. All subsequent references from the text are from this edition and they have been acknowledged with page numbers in parenthesis.

⁶⁶ The historical personalities that she is said to have come across are—Madam Cama in London (191), Dadasaheb Ambedkar, Taraknath Das and Lala Har Dayal in New York (221).

⁶⁷ While it is true that Ghosh's contemporaries engage with history in their novels, it is also equally true that no one, except Rushdie, has penned a novel that can be properly called a historical novel. In 2008, the year Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* was released, Rushdie published his *The Enchantress of Florence*. It is set in the medieval times and the action oscillates between the Mughal Emperor Akbar's court and Florence of Renaissance Italy.

⁶⁸ In an interview published in *Outlook* (July 17, 2000) magazine, Ghosh rues the paucity of literature on the subject: "It's not been written about at all! There's a single article by a historian, that too an Englishman, Hugh Tinker. On the Indian side, there's nothing except unpublished memoirs by survivors. In English, there are two novels to my knowledge: H.E. Bates' *The Jacaranda Tree*, and a fairly bad novel called *The Golden Stair*. It's strange—there were over half a million people on the Long March, over 400,000 of them Indian, and there is such a silence about it."

⁶⁹ In a stark reminder, the opulent celebrations of Malaysia's fiftieth year of Independence from Britain was disrupted recently by protests from a section of Malaysian Indians in Kuala Lumpur. Led by Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF), the protesters were marching towards the British embassy to submit a memorandum seeking the British monarch's intervention for the appointment of a counsel on behalf of Malaysian Indians. Earlier, in August 2007, HINDRAF had filed lawsuits in London seeking reparations to the tune of \$4 trillion from the present British government for deeds committed by imperial predecessors.

⁷⁰ Uma's argument, by Ghosh's own acknowledgement, is actually a rephrasing of Bal Gangadhar Tilak's argument regarding the spirit of social reform that is claimed by the apologists of colonialism to underwrite the whole colonial enterprise. Tilak's argument is centred on Burma's pre-colonial egalitarian society and the comfortable position of women within it that never was in need of social reform quite unlike India (Ghosh and Chakrabarty 157).

⁷¹ Amitav Ghosh presents an instance of a writer who has had a truly international upbringing and education. Born to a diplomat father he spent his early childhood in countries like Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), Sri Lanka and Iran. In India, he completed his studies up to Post graduation and later

studied at London, Tunisia and Egypt. Presently, he lives in the US and divides his time between US and India.

⁷² While discussing the complex idea of 'Swaraj' in the form of a dialogue between an imaginary Reader and an Editor, Gandhi replies to the Reader: "In effect it means this: that we want English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English, and, when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but Englistan. This is not the Swaraj that I want" (Parel 28).

⁷³ The description of the incidents on the first wedding night of Beni Prasad Dey and Uma is very similar to that of Nirad Chaudhuri's recounted by him in his Autobiography, which is quoted by Dipesh Chakrabarty in one of his papers ("Postcoloniality" 231). Both the descriptions are marked by the bridegrooms' easy familiarity and the brides' uneasiness with European music. So, while both the males are immersed within the artifacts of European modernity, the two females are outside those narratives. This intertextual insight may be construed as Ghosh's re-reading of Nirad Chaudhuri's text.

⁷⁴ *The Glass Palace* has an extremely interesting play on dress, especially with respect to Saya John and Rajkumar: "It was a ritual with Saya John, a kind of superstition, always to start these journeys in European clothes" (67). In his first appearance in the narrative, he is seen in European clothes (8) and he always changes into European dress before going to meet the forest Assistants who are invariably Europeans (71-72). By contrast, Rajkumar accompanies his mentor on his journeys "barefoot, like the porters, wearing nothing but a vest, a longyi and a farmer's wide-brimmed hat" (67). When Rajkumar is first spotted in Ratnagiri, we are told about "the dishevelled untidiness of his attire, his crumpled longyi, his greasy vest and his uncombed hair" (139). Both characters are, however, uneasy in European dress. Saya John, on whom they are "ill-fitting" (72), "sheds an article of clothing" on the return leg of his journeys so that he is finally dressed "in nothing more than a longyi and a vest" (68). Rajkumar, who is trained "to eat at a European table with a knife and fork" before his departure for Ratnagiri (131), "found it hard to cope with this atmosphere of constrained enactment" while dining at Uma's table in Ratnagiri (141).

⁷⁵ The epic roles are slightly reversed here. An average middle-class Hindu in India grows up either looking at or visualizing the image of the epic hero Arjun in Kurukshetra, squatting, hands folded in front of his charioteer Krishna, who sermonizes on Arjun's moral dilemma. In Ghosh's novel, Kishen Singh squats in front of Arjun asking the meaning of 'mercenary' (346). Moreover, while Arjun had wed Krishna's sister Subhadra, here, Kishen develops feelings of love for Arjun's sister, Bela.

⁷⁶ Meenakshi Mukherjee, in her Review of *The Glass Palace* "Of Love, War and Empire" published in *The Hindu* (October 01, 2000), remarks: "For all its vividness of description and range of human experiences, *The Glass Palace* will remain for me memorable mainly as the most scathing critique of British colonialism I have ever come across in fiction."

⁷⁷ Ghosh's second novel, *The Shadow Lines*, also ends with a scene of a sexual encounter that suggests possibilities of human relationships outside the categories dictated by history and cultural differences.

⁷⁸ In his recent memoir-cum-biography, Vikram Seth talks about the lessons of 'history writ large' and 'history writ little' (*Two Lives* 348).

⁷⁹ Ghosh has written admirably of Suu Kyi in an article on Burma published first in *The New Yorker* and then as part of the book, *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma*.

⁸⁰ Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 2004) 6. All further citations from the text are from this edition and have been acknowledged with page numbers in parenthesis.

⁸¹ Gadgil and Guha 3-4. Gadgil and Guha advance these three broad categories to which “all of India’s huge population” may be assigned (4). “Ecosystem people,” which comprises the “bulk of the poor, or even the not-so-affluent” depend on nature for meeting their needs of food, fodder and shelter (3). “Ecological refugees” are those communities displaced because of dams, mines or nature conservation projects. Whereas, “omnivores” comprise of mainly urban population who enjoy the fruits of economic development.

⁸² Anthony Vital, “Toward an African Ecocriticism.” Vital begins by outlining some of the thorny areas that beset the fields of ecocriticism and postcolonialism and goes on to read Coetzee’s text as offering possible solutions to the impasse.

⁸³ *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and published in 1996 is considered a seminal and indispensable text of ecocriticism. The definition quoted is from the “Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis.” Dana Phillips finds this definition to be “somewhat less qualified” (600n) while Christopher Hitt finds “simplicity and inclusiveness” in it (124).

⁸⁴ This nature versus culture dialectic, though not novel, underpins the philosophical foundations of ecocriticism. Even in a recent book *Ecocriticism*, the writer Greg Garrard veers towards the view that “(e)cocriticism is essentially about the demarcation between nature and culture, its construction and reconstruction” (qtd. in Heise 294).

⁸⁵ In the “Afterword” to his book, Love, charting a future for ecocriticism, concludes that “the postmodernist credo—borrowed from the social sciences—of human thought and behavior as formed by culture independent of biology has lost credibility, and that a new understanding which recognizes the role of our evolutionary past in shaping both human nature and culture is emerging” (163).

⁸⁶ Lawrence Buell, one of the most influential pioneers of ecocriticism, in his path-breaking study *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1996), defines ecocriticism “as study of the relation between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmental praxis (qtd. in Phillips 583). Phillips questions Buell’s spirit of commitment to environmental praxis on the ground that there is nothing evident in ecocritical practices that might lead one to assume that ecocritics are better suited for environmental praxis than the professional environmentalists and ecologists. Phillips even goes on to remark that until ecocriticism clears the air on such crucial issues, it “would seem to be just another variety of agitprop” (584).

⁸⁷ When Kanai beholds her the first time on the railway platform, he is struck by “the neatly composed androgyny of her appearance” that “seemed out of place, almost exotic” “against the sooty background of the commuter station” but may not have looked out of place among “a crowd of college girls on Kolkata’s Park Street” (3).

⁸⁸ In *How Much Should a Person Consume*, Ramachandra Guha compares two instances of direct action, one by Mark Dubois, an American environmentalist and the other by Medha Patkar, India's most well-known contemporary conservationist. While both the actions are directed against dams, there is a fundamental point of difference. Guha says: "The action by Dubois . . . was quite in line with the dominant thrust of the environmental movement in the North, which is toward the protection of pristine, unspoiled nature . . . In protecting the wild, it asserts, we are both acknowledging an ethical responsibility toward other species and enriching the spiritual side of our own existence. By contrast, the action by Patkar was consistent with the dominant thrust of the environmental movement in India, which powerfully foregrounds the questions of production and distribution within human society" (67).

⁸⁹ Fokir constantly reminds the readers of Rudyard Kipling's abiding creation Mowgli, a human foundling adopted by a family of wolves and immortalized in the pages of his *Jungle Book*. Mowgli—who strikes up friendship with Bagheera, the black panther and Baloo, the sleepy bear—ultimately kills Shere Khan, the tiger who had killed Mowgli's parents. Mowgli's friendship with the animals and antagonism with the tiger is strangely evocative of Fokir's position—in complete unison with crabs, dolphins and most other species, he, nevertheless, actively takes part in the burning of the tiger.

⁹⁰ There are also other moments in the narrative when the narrator/novelist looms large on Piya's horizon, as when Piya thinks that the shampoo sachet had been kept in the makeshift bathroom "in her honour" and throwing "it away would be to abuse this offering" (86). A similar streak is discernible when she goes into the island of Garjontola with the intuitive knowledge that "she would be safe" with Fokir (151).

⁹¹ *The Hungry Tide*, with a professional translator and interpreter in Kanai, abounds in situations that require translations. Kanai's position, as has been argued, is crucial because he not only acts as the interpreter between Piya and Fokir, but also translates for Piya a part of the Bon Bibi legend. The case of translation of Nirmal's diary from the original Bengali into English is somewhat tricky. Technically speaking, this translation cannot be attributed to Kanai because while he must have read the diary in original Bengali, the translated version that the reader reads is surely the work of the novelist. Kanai's profession and position create this false impression and Ghosh must be praised for collapsing this boundary between himself and his character.

⁹² In 1977, the first Left Front ministry was sworn in West Bengal and the settlers, predominantly proletariats, had pinned their hopes on this communist ministry.

⁹³ Though Guha makes this comment in reference to the conservationist movements of "peasants, tribals, and so on" (64), these movements are interpreted as resistant by the government, the state and the nation much like the resistance of the displaced settlers in *The Hungry Tide*.

⁹⁴ Nirmal and Nilima's first visit to Lusibari had coincided "with the annual celebration of the founder's birthday. They discovered, to their astonishment, that this occasion was observed with many of the ceremonial trappings of a *pūja*. Statues of Sir Daniel, of which there were many scattered through the estate, were garlanded, smeared with vermilion and accorded many other marks of reverence. It was clear that in the eyes of the local people the visionary Scotsman was, if not quite a deity, then certainly a venerated ancestral spirit" (78).

⁹⁵ 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home' are the two titles for the parts of *The Shadow Lines* while 'The Ebb: Bhata' and 'The Flood: Jowar' are the titles for the two parts of *The Hungry Tide*.

⁹⁶ The English terms 'uncle' and 'nephew' are somewhat inadequate to describe the relationships that exist between the narrator and his uncle Tridib in *The Shadow Lines* and between Nirmal and Kanai in *The Hungry Tide*. Whereas Tridib is the cousin of the narrator's father, Nirmal is the husband of Kanai's mother's sister.

⁹⁷ Talking of pairs of characters, there is, in each novel, a pair of two children who give each other company. Kanai's childhood friendship with Kusum is deeply reminiscent of the narrator's friendship with Ila in *The Shadow Lines*. There is a scene in *The Hungry Tide* of the two children playing (91) that bears a remarkable resemblance to a similar scene from *The Shadow Lines* (72).

⁹⁸ This episode was first published as "The Imam and the Indian" in the 1986 winter issue of *Granta*. Reprinted several times, this has also been published in the collected Prose Pieces of Amitav Ghosh in 2002 to which it has given its name.

⁹⁹ Partha Chatterjee, reviewing the novel in *The Hindu* remarks: "He tries in this work, perhaps without conscious intention, to capture the flavour of the Bengali language including the dialects of the Sundarbans where it unfolds." Supriya Choudhury, reviewing the novel in *Biblio* comments: "Some Bengali reviewers of *The Hungry Tide* have already asserted that their experience of reading it was like that of reading a novel in Bangla."

¹⁰⁰ Ghosh is often hailed as the most scholarly practitioner of IWE and his novels are known for creatively incorporating the researched data. The technical terminology related to weaving in *The Circle of Reason*, the history of malaria research in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, and the details of teak trade in *The Glass Palace* sometimes threaten to disturb the delicate balance between researched data and the creative content. Sagarika Ghose, reviewing the novel in *The Indian Express*, comments: "One complaint one can make of *The Hungry Tide* is that details of dolphin behaviour or tracking equipment or the various nomenclature of topographical features threaten to swamp its philosophical undertow. The author is clearly delighted by the sheer sound of words like mohona, creeks, bilges and gunwales." Having said this, the reviewer concludes: "Yet his purpose remains clear throughout."

¹⁰¹ In *The Circle of Reason*, Zaghloul's dance (337) bears striking similarities to the dance of a girl in *In An Antique Land* (202). In an interview, Ghosh makes the point that both the dance scenes are straight out of his Egypt diaries (Chambers, "Absolute" 28).

¹⁰² Sagarika Ghose, reviewing *The Hungry Tide* in *The Indian Express*, comments: "If there is a distinctive genre known as Indian Writing in English, then Amitav Ghosh is perhaps its most scholarly practitioner."

¹⁰³ This should not be taken to mean that historical knowledge silences all other knowledge in Ghosh: in his first novel, he has displayed his knowledge of the finer shades and nuances of weaving; *The Glass Palace* has passages devoted to the teak trade and photography; and the scholarly knowledge about the behaviour of river dolphins has been masterly woven into the text of *The Hungry Tide*.

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PUBLICATIONS

Papers Published

1. **Prasad, Abhigyan.** “The Calcutta Chromosome: A Case for Subaltern Epistemology.” Journal of the Department of English of Gauhati University 5 (March 2004): 54-65.
2. **Prasad, Abhigyan,** and Rohini Mokashi-Punekar. “Imperial Frontier to National Border: Narration, History and Identity in Ghosh’s The Glass Palace.” JSL (Spring 2008): 40-51.

Paper Accepted

3. **Prasad, Abhigyan,** and Rohini Mokashi-Punekar. “Absence as Presence: The Construction of ‘subalternity’ in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome*” has been accepted for publication in a forthcoming volume Subaltern Vision: A Study in Postcolonial Indian English Novel to be published by Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi.

Paper Communicated

4. **Prasad, Abhigyan,** and Rohini Mokashi-Punekar. “Subversive Memory: The Narrative Technique of Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines.”