The Clamour of the Voices Within: A Postcolonial Reading of the Novels of Amitav Ghosh

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled **"The Clamour of the Voices Within: A Postcolonial Reading of the Novels of Amitav Ghosh"** submitted to the University of Calicut, for the award of the degree of of Doctor of Philosophy, is a record of bonafide research carried out by **Roshi K Das**, under my supervision and guidance. No part of this thesis has been submitted earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, title or recognition.

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DECLARATION

I, Roshi K Das, hereby declare that the thesis titled **"The Clamour of the Voices Within: A Postcolonial Reading of the Novels of Amitav Ghosh"** submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a bona fide record of research carried out by me, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma, associateship, fellowship or any other similar titles.

Place: Devagiri

Date : **Roshi K Das**

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Dedication

To my dear mom who is forever dedicated to us.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I could not live without the clamour of the voices… (Ghosh, *The Shadow* 67)

Amitav Ghosh has always been a force to reckon with in the field of Indian writing in English; with the conferring of Jnanpith in 2018 he becomes an Indian English writer with an unprecedented career graph. Even after being included in the list of languages to be considered for the much-coveted prize post the forty-ninth Jnanpith award, English had to patiently wait a few more years to be honoured and recognised 'an Indian language.' When Ghosh received the fifty-fourth Jnanpith on June12, 2019 the litterateur-cum-historian was creating another history.

Amitav Ghosh, born to Colonel Shailendranath Ghosh and Anjali on July 11, 1956, spent his childhood in Srilanka, Bangladesh, Iran and India owing to his father's post in the foreign ministry. When he went to St. Stephen's College for graduation, he switched from English literature to History for he thought doing a degree in literature kills one's pleasure in literature. After an itinerant period of working as a journalist, travelling between the US and Egypt for procuring a doctoral degree, working in the Delhi University and working on a fellowship at the Centre of Social Sciences, Kerala he published his first book *The Circle of Reason*(1986) which instantly established him in the arena of Indian English fiction.

Ghosh is a writer known for his prolificacy; from 1986 till date he has published ten novels and five works of non-fiction and has garnered recognitions such as Sahitya Academy Award, Prix Medicis Estrangere, Ananda Puraskar,

Arthur C Clarke award for the best sci-fi novel, Grinzane Cavour prize, Dan David prize, Crossword Book Jury award, Utah award, Padma Shri and the very recent Jnanpith. His works of fiction include *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1989), *In an Antique Land* (1992), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *The Ibis Trilogy*(2008-2015), *The Gun Island* (2019) and non-fiction *Dancing in Cambodia, at Large in Burma* (1998), *Countdown* (1999), *The Imam and the Indian* (2002), *Incendiary Circumstances* (2006) and *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016). Ghosh has often made clear that for him the real prize of writing is just writing. As the 'Author's Notes' to his works make clear, his works, irrespective of their fictional or non-fictional traits, come out of extensive research.

All of Ghosh's works have dealt with issues like identity, borders, border crossings, displaced families, recovered histories and so on. His formal training as an anthropologist has only augmented his interest in the inanimate and the non-human, a point he always enunciates in his lectures. Ghosh's writings have been translated into more than twenty languages and he is someone whose voice is avidly listened to; be it the details his novels carry or the concerns they engage in, be it his conversations about the contemporary or history he is always widely recognised. He is a master story-teller whose works of non-fiction even are rendered highly readable by their anecdotal nature.

Ghosh has often talked about the people who have influenced him and these mainly are V. S. Naipaul, Rabindranath Tagore, Sharadindu Bhattacharya, Satyajit Ray, Marcel Proust, Honore de Balzac, Herman Melville and James Boswell. Ghosh who has taught in many American and Indian universities now divides his time

between Goa in India and Brooklyn in New York. His family includes his wife Deborah Baker, who also is a creative writer and children Lila and Nayan.

Robert Dixon concludes his essay "Travelling in the West: The Writing of Amitav Ghosh" pointing out how Ghosh's novels like *The Circle of Reason* or *In an Antique Land* use voices of the past to intervene in the present in a very allegorical manner (35). The nameless narrator of *The Shadow Lines* states in the novel that he can't do away with the clamour of the voices. Ghosh accommodates a space in his novels for these multiplicities. They sustain him and prove an essential aspect of his fictional worlds.

Leela Gandhi in her essay "A Choice of Histories: Ghosh vs. Hegel in *In an Antique Land*" writes about an imaginary meeting between Hegel and Ghosh in a time-warp. Hegel has written the *Phenomenology of Mind* and Ghosh has written *In an Antique Land*. They engage in a debate on Hegel's philosophy of history, model of bondage and lordship and dialectical system. Debate, as Ghosh usually makes clear in interviews, is his forte; Leela Gandhi writes that Ghosh wins the debate, thus reforming Hegel which prompts him to revise his book which was never finished because his untimely death intervened (56). Such is our faith in Ghosh; he would never lose an argument. Ghosh is an author who is worshipped, idolised and sometimes censured by his readers/critics. This thesis attempts to read Ghosh from the theoretical angle of third space and hybridity.

Homi Bhabha writes in *The Location of Culture* how the exploration of the third space allows people to 'elude the politics of polarity' (39). Third space allows room for the multiplicity of voices, genres, and uncanniness that we find in Ghosh. Ashcroft et al in the introduction to their *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* talk about

the power of hybridity that allows "a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth" (183).

In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha writes about the cultures and the 'intertextuality of their historical locations' (34). He writes how these things are often forgotten and totalized cultures are perceived as the norm. He writes about the 'utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity' (34). Cultures have been always diverse and cultural homogeneity for Bhabha is a utopian myth. Ghosh talks about how relevant this idea is in the geopolitical area of the Indian subcontinent which has entered in to a stage of globalisation even in the centuries before Christ. Jason Neelis in *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks: Mobility and Exchange within and beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia* talks about the maritime routes in the Indian Ocean which existed as early as sixth/fifth century BCE (184). Ghosh makes manifest these ancient cultural exchanges and interactions through his novels and tries to undo the myths of unique cultural identities. He shows how this inclusivity was by and by replaced by the exclusivity of colonial/modern times.

Bhabha writes that the third space may "open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of cultures' *hybridity.* To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter'- the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space-that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (38). Bhabha talks of negotiations and not of negations. Third space hosts

negotiations. According to Bhabha this third space represents both general conditions and specific implications (36).

Third space could be a place of gathering as well; it may be where people from different cultures meet and interact. In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha speaks about the importance of the

> gathering of exiles and émigrés and refugees, gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gathering 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 signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in ritual of revival; gathering the present. (291)

This is a coming together of the past and the present. In itself the third space remedies a world that is shorn of its multiple voices.

Bhabha writes in *The Location of Culture* how cultures are not unitary; he says that they are not even dualistic. "It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (37). Cultures are not monolithic narratives. They understand and accommodate differences. They don't believe in the tyranny of a single explanation.

Ghosh respects, understands and appreciates differences; he doesn't pay much heed to monolithic narratives. He talks about the advantages of maturity in his correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty: "One of the subtler pleasures of growing

up is that one comes to understand the true meaning of the Arabic saying, 'ad-dunia was'a'; 'the world is wide'. To be able to understand and appreciate ideas that are different from one's own is a gift in itself…" (166).

Chinua Achebe in his "Named for Victoria, Queen of England" writes about his status of being a bilingual. He says that people always ask him to write in Igbo which is his native language. To drive the point home, they ask him in which language does he dream. Achebe replies that he dreams in both the languages (190). That is a postcolonial reality. But the linguistic hybridity that one finds in Ghosh is not singularly a postcolonial phenomenon. In a geopolitical space like the Indian subcontinent polylingualism is a precolonial reality which found a continuation in the postcolonial times as well. Achebe writes about how they lived at "the cross roads of cultures" (190). It's a statement that the history of the Indian subcontinent validates by having always lived at 'the crossroads of cultures'.

In this thesis the first seven of Ghosh's novels are analysed to throw light on how the author concretises Bhabha's theory of the hybrid third space. Ghosh has never proclaimed himself as a postcolonial writer. He has always been against categorisation. John C Hawley in his monograph on Amitav Ghosh quotes Meenakshi Mukherjee to underscore Ghosh's antipathy towards being categorised (4). But his essential interest in people which he makes clear in *Incendiary Circumstances* when he writes that "nothing human should be alien to me" (53) makes him subscribe to all the theories that deal with people and thus to postcolonialism as well. What the thesis argues is that Ghosh does away with the usual dichotomies and creates a Third Space in his works. This hybrid third space in Ghosh allows the possibility of multiple voices; it allows voices to be heard. Some

of these voices are literal voices that speak in multiple tongues. Some speak of cultural hybridities. Certain of these voices talk of an interconnected subcontinent for which being globalised is a phenomenon that began back in the ancient eras and simply grew steadily through the colonial and postcolonial times. These voices join together and offer themselves clearly to anyone who wants to lend an ear and extract their meaning.

Even though to date Ghosh has authored ten novels and five books of non-fiction this thesis analyses the first seven of his novels. When this project was begun only seven of them were published. It doesn't study the last two books of the Ibis Trilogy and the latest *Gun Island*. It does make references to his non- fiction works whenever similar points are discussed in connection with his novels. Including the latest three books would have extended the scope of this study but they are not included as it would have been impossible to accord proper justice to all in the brief span of this thesis.

John C Hawley writes about two interesting aspects of Ghosh's writing: one is "the novelist's abiding interest in listening to the voice of the anonymous individual" (16) and the other is postcoloniality (17). His interest is not in the binary definitions of the East and the West. He writes about the relations and interconnections between different colonised countries (17). John Thieme in the essay "The Discoverer Discovered: Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*" writes: "Ghosh is concerned to excavate a labyrinthine network of traces… while making clear that essentialist versions of national and regional cultures, such as those inherent in Orientalist discourses, are unsustainable" (129).

Ghosh has commented on the national and international political/cultural scenarios through his fictional and non-fictional works. In an interview with John C Hawley Ghosh talks about how his commitment to his work has made him a writer, otherwise he would be a politician. He talks about how he was moved to write *Countdown* after the nuclear tests of 1998. He wrote it when he was in the middle of his fourth novel *The Glass Palace.* He didn't want anything to interrupt his work then and still he wrote *Countdown* because he felt there was no choice, he felt bound to write. Ghosh says that he believes that responding to what happens out there also is a commitment of a writer; but it shouldn't be to be swamped by the political pressures (11).

The Circle of Reason, Ghosh's first novel which is deemed a picaresque one by many readers and critics follows the chief character Alu through India, the Arab nations and the Middle East. Stephen C Hawley writes of it as "a detective story, a story of exile, a travelogue, a women's rights tract, a Marxist protest, a plea for humanist camaraderie, etc" (54). The novel is divided into three sections: Satwa, Rajas and Tamas. The first section deals with the early years of Alu that he spent in India with his uncle Balaram who is a staunch believer in reason, logic and science. For Balaram the book *Life of Pasteur* is like the Bible, to be gone back to and referred at every crucial point. He reads books on phrenology, a field of science which over the course of time became a pseudo-science and measures skulls to make predictions regarding peoples' nature and future. He stays in the village of Lalpukur and teaches in a school owned by Bhudeb Singh, his arch enemy. This enmity which is hilarious as well as serious results in the blasting of Balaram's house that kills all the members of the family except Alu. Alu after this is always on the run as he is

being pursued by the IPS officer Jyoti Das who assumes that he is a terrorist. The second part sees Alu in the fictional country of al-Ghazira as he is trying to flee from Jyoti Das. Alu survives after a five storeyed building crashes around him as Jyoti Das continues his hunt for Alu after he gets permission from the authorities to fly abroad to track down the notorious terrorist. Alu makes the town aware of his philosophies regarding germ, dirt and money and cleanses the city clean with carbolic acid, just as his uncle did back in the village of Lalpukur. The new obsession of the townspeople somehow alerts the authorities who, suspecting a civil uprising, open fire against a peaceful procession that was trying to retrieve the sewing machines that saved Alu during the crash. Alu again is on the run, this time with certain friends. In the third section titled Tamas, Alu and his friends are in the town El Oued in Algeria with Jyoti Das close on their heels. Here they meet Dr. Uma, a microbiologist who is also under the spell of the book *Life of Pasteur* and as the book flows towards the final pages we see Alu and Uma breaking free of their obsession with this book. Jyoti Das, an ornithologist by taste, stops chasing Alu and instead plans to chase his dreams somewhere abroad. Alu and Zindi decide to settle down with Boss, the son of Karthamma.

The Shadow Lines, the only novel by Ghosh that follows a first person point of view is told by an unnamed narrator. The novel has two sections: ‘Going Away’ and ‘Coming Home’ which make clear the uncertainty surrounding the acts of going away and coming home. It is a novel of memories and begins with Tridib, the narrator’s uncle and ends with the revelation of the ‘final redemptive mystery’ of his death. The bildungsroman describes the growth of the narrator from a gullible boy to a mature man with deep insights and Tridib, his uncle, who was lynched by a riotous

mob in Dhaka, is the key to this development. As the narrator solves the mystery surrounding this death through many voices en route he discovers the shadowy nature of borders and understands that it is not distance that separates people. Ghosh has often spoken about the arbitrariness of borders and pointed out that one effective way of dealing with them is to disregard them. There are long passages in *The Shadow Lines* which show the reader that the myths underlying nation-making are all lies. Using Tridib's *Bartholomew Atlas* the narrator shows us how things don't actually square up with regard to the layman's concept of nation. In the essay "The Ghosts of Mrs.Gandhi" Ghosh writes that *The Shadow Lines* "became a book not about any one event but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who live through them" (60). *The Shadow Lines* draws largely upon memory and even politicises it. The novel has a jumbled time sequence; some of the events take place in the 1930s, before the narrator's birth, when Europe was into the Second World War and the events of this period are retrieved from the narrator's memory of Tridib's stories. Tridib then was in the Prices' house in England and England was being bombed by the Axis powers. Another time period is the Sixties when the narrator is a boy who avidly devours the stories of Tridib. This is when he gets infatuated with Ila, sees May Price and loses Tridib. The third time sequence is around the 1980s, the narrator is in England seeing for the first time places which were sketched before him by Tridib's magical words. He discovers that Ila is in love with Nick Price and from May Price he comes to know of the circumstances surrounding Tridib's death. There is another time span in which a mature narrator ruminates over the nature of borders and distance. The novel addresses questions like a human being's relationship with the world, it depicts a riot-torn Calcutta,

England during the first world war, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India going through tumultuous times because of the arbitrated shadow lines of borders. The novel questions the concepts of nation and space as it hails memory as a personal and political thing. Like the narrator of the novel asks Ila, Ghosh poses his question before the readers: "the true question is, how can you forget?" (34).

The Calcutta Chromosome mixes history and fiction to talk about a historical incident. The novel traces the trajectory of Ronald Ross' Nobel Prize winning discovery of the malaria vector and begins with Antar, who leads a very sedentary and solitary work life, chancing upon the identity card of a lost colleague, Murugan. Antar is an Egyptian who is working with "Life Watch" and is largely lost in the suburbs of an American city. The ID card sets a lot of things in motion and Antar is thrown into the story of Murugan which is a story of counter science, fevers, secrets and deliriums. Thus, he comes to know how Ross' discovery was made out of a blue print prepared by a subaltern sect which was working its way towards attaining immortality. Mangala, the high priestess of the cult uses the disease to cure syphilis and also to ensure the transmission of *The Calcutta Chromosome* which bestows immortality on the possessor. From being a mere listener who is mildly interested in Murugan's stories, Antar is slowly drawn to the centre of the stage as he is shown to be next in line to receive the titular chromosome. In this novel Ghosh talks about the possibilities of different stories which counter the known or propagated history.

In an Antique Land details the adventures of two Indians who have travelled overseas to Egypt. Even though Ghosh prefers to call it a non-fiction work several critics have seen it as a work of fiction and so does this study. Among the two Indians one is the author himself who is addressed by the Egyptians as Amitabh and

the other is a slave whose name, as the author researches out, is Bomma. Bomma was a mere footnote in history which the author develops through his research. The researching author is tangled in cultural dilemmas in Egypt. He is constantly pelted with questions regarding the cultural differences between India and Egypt which are by and large differences in religious etiquettes. Bomma was a precolonial traveller, a slave, who journeyed out in to the seas as a representative of his master. Ghosh juxtaposes two Indians from two different time periods and points out the extent to which their experiences differ. Bomma is the slave in Ghosh's essay "The Slave of MS. H6" which initially appeared in the seventh volume of *Subaltern Studies*. The manuscript was initially part of the Geniza, a treasure house of documents in Cairo, which was emptied by the Europeans. Ghosh shows how the non-hegemonic Eastern world has been disrupted by the power structures and violence of the Western missions of colonisation.

The Glass Palace is a family saga which moves through Burma, Malaya, England, the US, Singapore and India. The novel begins with Rajkumar, an orphaned eleven-year-old Indian boy in Mandalay who grows street-smart in the skills of survival. The first half of his life story is a rags-to-riches one, but the second half topples the predictability and unveils the characteristic uncertainties of human lives. The novel tells the story of the intertwining families of Rajkumar, Uma and Saya John and thereby the stories of Burma, India and Malaya. Uma is a nationalist who undergoes a major change and finds out that the methods of ahimsa are far more suitable to the nationalist struggle than the violent means. The novel talks about the English invasion of Burma, Indian settlement there, the attributes of the colonized India, colonial enterprises of the exploitation of natural resources, the

ambivalent subalterns, rise of Indian nationalism and the transformation of a prosperous Burma to a ramshackle and torn Myanmar. The novel is narrated by a member of the family who belongs to the fourth generation as depicted in the novel. He is trying to chronicle his family's history which is intertwined with many other families and many other nations.

The Hungry Tide is set in a single location unlike all the other novels. It tells the story of the islands around the Sundarbans in West Bengal which are collectively known as the tide country. Tide country is a palimpsest which has been there all along; it doesn't allow anything to change it, it wipes out the traces that time tries to leave on it. The surface of the land may look clean, but there are layers of time inscribed beneath. In the novel Piya, a Bengali cetologist with an American nationality reaches the Sundarbans to continue her research on river dolphins, Gangetic and Irawaddy varieties. In the course of the research she meets several Bengalees like Kanai, the translator, Fokir, the mystic, Nilima, the activist etc. Through the journal of Nilima's husband Nirmal, the novel voices the forgotten history of the Morichjhapi incident in which thousands of refugees from Bangladesh were killed in Morichjhapi, the pepper island in a state sponsored massacre. Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* is a holy book for Nirmal in *The Hungry Tide* and his journal is replete with Rilke's quotes. Piya's research takes her deeper into the islands where the party is separated in an impending storm. In the storm Fokir sacrifices his life to save Piya's thereby binding her to the land. Like all other inhabitants of the tide country Piya, towards the end of the novel finds it impossible to leave the land that becomes water periodically. She decides to stay on, continue her research and build a memorial for Fokir through it. Kanai, transformed by the

journey inwards the islands and the storm decides to make the tide country his second home.

Sea of Poppies is the first instalment of Ibis trilogy that is set around the years of the ignominious opium wars. Ibis is a ship that was originally a black birder which in the novel is refurbished to transport indentured labourers and opium. *Sea of Poppies* throws light on the less discussed chapters of large-scale poppy cultivation and opium trade in the history of India. Ghosh shows how opium was the backbone of the colonial projects in India and how it disrupted the system of agriculture here. He talks about the practice of indentured labour, the causes that led to the establishment of the system and about the camaraderie that people strike up even in the most adverse circumstances. The major characters around whom the novel gyrates are Deeti, Neel, Paulette, Jodu, Zachary Reid, Kalua, Baboo Nob Kissin etc. Deeti is a village woman speaking Bhojpuri who ends up in the ship Ibis as a girmitiya, an indentured labourer along with her husband Kalua, a dalit who saves her from being a Sati. The multiple stories and characters of *Sea of Poppies* merge at last on board Ibis, the ship thus making it the frame story. Neel is a landlord who gets in the trap of the English trader Burnham, is convicted in a forgery case and sent to a penal settlement across the seas. Zachary Reid is an African American who passes off as a white man owing to several happy and unhappy coincidences. Paulette is a French woman nativized enough to be considered a Bengali and Baboo Nob Kissin is a gomusta, a clerk who undergoes a gender change and evolves as a matriarch who he himself believes is the reincarnation of Ma Taramony, his spiritual guru. Ibis is the *mai-bap* of these people who affectionately watch these make-overs. The novel ends with the convicts fleeing the ship along with Jodu, Kalua and Serang

Ali and Deeti, Paulette, Zachary and Baboo Nob Kissin watching them from the ship, caught in a storm.

Amitav Ghosh has always received more than a considerable amount of critical attention, the fact that he has been on the syllabi of many universities for decades must have added to the fairly extensive analyses that his works receive. Critical material on Ghosh is in a state of rapid growth reflecting his popularity, validity and importance as a major Indian English writer.

The two monographs that have been written on Amitav Ghosh so far were penned by John C Hawley (2005) and Anshuman A Mondal (2007). Hawley's monograph which was published in the 'Contemporary Indian Writers in English' series discusses Ghosh's first six novels and three works of non-fiction and tries to place Ghosh in the contemporary scenario. Mondal's monograph analyses how Ghosh came to the centre stage of Indian English writing talking about the marginalized people, histories and belief systems and tries to foreground the ambivalences that the reader confronts in Ghosh's works. This book which came out in the 'Contemporary World Writers' series stands by the view that ambivalence is the most apt position that a postcolonial writer can adopt.

Some books that delve into the world of Ghosh's writings in a humanist manner are K.K Singh's *Ethos of Cross-Culturalism and the Novels of Amitav Ghosh* (2016), Richa Dewani's *Amitav Ghosh: A Biographical Study* (2013), Anjan Kumar's *The Novels of Amitav Ghosh: Major Themes* (2013).

Apart from full-length books there are several collections of essays available on Ghosh's fictional and non-fictional narratives. One such widely-read book is *Amitav Ghosh: A Criitical Companion* (2003) edited by Tabish Khair and containing

"the most exciting work on an exciting author" (8). This book opens with a tributary piece on Satyajit Ray penned by Ghosh himself describing how Ray's works are one of his major moorings. This book which is deemed a ready-reference book by every scholar working on Ghosh carries essays by Robert Dixon, Claire Chambers, Leela Gandhi, Padmini Mongia, John Thieme, Anjali Gera, Tabish Khair and Rukmini Bhaya Nair.

Brinda Bose's *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives* addresses some major concerns that surround Ghosh's works like postcoloniality, history, diaspora and nostalgia. Bhibhash Choudhary's collection of critical essays on Amitav Ghosh explores multiple aspects of his writings and examines the way in which certain ideas consolidate in his texts and how a certain analytical temper topples what is usually identified as his style. Another notable collection of essays is *In Pursuit of Amitav Ghosh: Some Recent Readings* (2013) edited by Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Prasanta Bhattacharya. The Oxford University Press edition of *The Shadow Lines* incorporates four essays on the novel; by Suvir Kaul, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and AN Kaul. In the introduction to *History, Narrative and Testimony in Amitav Ghosh's Fiction* (2012), a collection of essays, Chitra Sankaran writes about the transnational nature of Ghosh's narratives and transgressive aspects of his aesthetics.

It is usually said in an almost orientalist manner that when the Western readership favours *In an Antique Land,* the Indian readers and critics are captivated by *The Shadow Lines*. Numerous critical analyses of this single book have appeared in India. Rajnish Mishra's *Critical Perspectives on Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines,* I.D Sharma's *The Shadow Lines: A Study,* Shakti Batra's *Amitav Ghosh: The*

Shadow Lines, Nivedhaa Nivi's *Postcolonial elements in Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines,* a critical volume edited by Arvind Chowdhary, a critical companion solely dedicated to the book edited by Murali Prasad etc. are just a few to list.

Postcolonial readings of the works of Amitav Ghosh have been done by many researchers. Mahesh Waghmare's *Colonial Desire and Hybridity in the Selected Fiction of Amitav Ghosh* (2014) talks about the thematic concerns that recur in four of Ghosh's novels: *The Shadow Lines*, *In an Antique Land*, *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies*. Even though his thesis works on the elements of hybridity in Ghosh's novels it doesn't tread on the same terrains of this thesis. Waghmare's thesis is a textual analysis of four of Ghosh's novels and the kinds of imperialist assumptions and metissages they host. This thesis differs from it in that this traces the continuum of hybridity through different ages depicted in Ghosh's novels with special attention given to the idea of the third space.

The Quest for Cultural Identity: Postcolonialist impulses in Amitav Ghosh (2005) by Sujatha S is a close textual analysis of Ghosh's novels. Sankar R's *Postcolonial Identities: A Study of South Asian Characters in Select Novels of Amitav Ghosh* (2015) is a thesis that tries to explore the sociological, psychological, cultural and economic aspects that Ghosh portrays in his novels. Chitra C in her *Postcolonial Consciousness in Amitav Ghosh* (2012) looks at the issues of partition, communal violence, cross-cultural relationships, migrancy and the impacts of colonisation that are seen in the works of Ghosh. Girish Basavraj Kalyanshetti in *Postcolonial Consciousness in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh* (2007) studies the impact of postcolonialism on Ghosh and examines how his works are correlated to the perspectives of globalisation and in general to humanity. Sandeep Ashok Wagh's

The Marginalized Subverting the Centre: A Study of the Novels of Amitav Ghosh (2017) studies how Ghosh meets the challenge of recovering and representing the marginalized in his novels. *Postcolonial Discourse in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh and Chinua Achebe* (2017) by Kewel Venkatrao Nemmaniwar is a thematic analysis of the postcolonial aspects in the select novels of Achebe and Ghosh. Another comparative study of the postcolonial elements in the works of four Indian English authors is done by Manish Solanki's *Postcolonialism in the Major Novels of Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh and Shashi Tharoor* (2018).

Another area that is much worked upon is the manner in which Ghosh puts his cartography to work in his works: his sheer disregard of borders, his refusal to shut his imagination up in the turbulences that a single nation undergoes and his cosmopolitanism form part of this unique cartography. Dilip Chandro Halder's *Postcolonial Perspectives in the Works of Amitav Ghosh* (2013) depicts how Ghosh constructs a lyrical, borderless world through his works. *Multiple Voices and Their Dispalcement: A Study of the Fiction of Amitav Ghosh* (2011) by Lalawmpia S talks about the influence of postcolonial and modern theory in the novels of Ghosh and states that borderlessness is a characteristic of his writings. It speaks about concepts like home, utopia and nostalgia all the while asserting that national boundaries are meant to be crossed. Borooah Diba's *Postcolonial Critique and Realities: A Study of Amitav Ghosh and Chinua Achebe* (2015) shows how both these writers offer counter-narratives to the existing colonial narratives along with a counter cartography. The cosmopolitan nature of Ghosh's works and the idea of 'vasudhaiva kudumbakam' they embody are detailed in Deepak Thakur's thesis *Beyond Nationalism and National Boundaries: A Study of Amitav Ghosh's Select Novels*

(2006). Naresh Chelle's *Cross-cultural Perspectives in the Selected Novels of Amitav Ghosh* (2012) again is a study of the cross-cultural aspects in Ghosh's novels.

Aspects of migration and diaspora in Ghosh's works also have become the central idea of some theses. *Migration for Survival in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh* (2017) by Soumini P analyses the theme of migration and meaning of home in three of Ghosh's novels: *The Shadow Lines*, *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*. Jani George's *Transnationalism, Hybridity and Alienation: The Expatriates's Dilemma in Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines, In an Antique Land and Jhumpa Lahiris's The Namesake* (2014) tries to elucidate the problems of migration in the select works.

Many theses like Prasanna Devi's *History as a Tool: A Study of the Select Novels of Amitav Ghosh* (2017), Kalavani N's *History, Fantasy and Fiction in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh*(2013), Pankaj Sharma's *Recreation and Representation of History in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh* (2013) work on how Ghosh works on the projected histories and undermine them. The role of history in Ghosh's works is perceived from a postcolonial point of view in Hameed Khan's *Amitav Ghosh: The Postcolonial Rewriting of History and culture* (2007). Lizie Williams' *Reconstruction of History through Quest for Identity: A Study of the Cross-Cultural Matrix in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh* (2013) examines Ghosh's novels with reference to the theories of Said, Fanon, Spivak and Bhabha and argues how his use of history differs from the techniques of elitist historiography. Krishnakumar V's *Postcolonial Preoccupations in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh* (2002) is a close

reading of Ghosh's novels that reveals concerns like distorted history and subaltern consciousness.

Ghosh is a much-worked-upon author and even briefly mentioning the extant criticism on the works of Ghosh is a task that borders on the impossible. This thesis makes use of several essays on and interviews of Ghosh many of which were accessed through the platform of NList. Amitav Ghosh's official website sports the links to many interviews, and interviews that were telecast through various TV channels are available in You Tube. With regard to the theses only certain of them which are concerned with topics and areas similar to this thesis have been pointed out.

The chapters in this thesis are organized thematically. The current chapter introducing this thesis is the first one which gives a brief bio-sketch of the author and later on talks about the dimensions and scope of this work. It also introduces the theory this thesis works upon and touches upon the critical works available on Ghosh.

The second chapter titled "The Medley of Voices: Linguistic Polyphony in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh" analyses the linguistic hybridity one finds in the novels of Ghosh. After a general summing up of the theories concerning the postcolonial use of language, Chantal Zabus' idea of the third register that is an unfamiliar mix of European and native languages is cited connecting it with Bhabha's notion of the third space. For an intrinsically polyglot society like India which was globalised even before the formal entry of Globalisation, this third register is a mix of some other sets of languages as well. The chapter discusses the influence of pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial scenarios on the language that

Ghosh uses. Ghosh's mixing up of languages or the 'Ghoshean flavour' that critics like Sajal Bhattacharya term as a “unique brand of language that is a postcolonial variant” (137) is a way of paying homage to a precolonial culture of accommodations and remembering the colonial and postcolonial influences. Ghosh's khichrification of languages like Bengali, Hindi, Arabic, Bhojpuri, Burmese, Hindustani, Chinese, Cantonese, Malayalam, Chinese Pidgin English, Laskari, Mauritian Ceole, Judeo-Arabic and English is seen as a postcolonial writer's way of placing the past and future.

The third chapter “Jahazbhais and Jahazbahens: Hybrid Spaces in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh” discusses the hybrid spaces that the reader confronts in the novels of Ghosh. Ghosh is deeply suspicious of any effort of homogenisation and doesn’t believe in the myth of insular spaces. The chapter talks about the hybridity of religions, miscegenations, architecturally and functionally hybrid spaces, mimic men, mirrors and the critique of colonialism that one finds in the novels of Amitav Ghosh. Ghosh’s houses are not machines to live in that let the resident wall out the outer world. Ghosh’s defiance of binaries and the importance of the number three that his novels sport are analysed. The chapter makes use of Bhabha’s theorisation of the third space as an in-between space. These cultural interstices offer possibilities of creative intervention for the writer. What the chapter tries to say is that such interstitial hybrid spaces are what give the postcolonial writings their breathing spaces.

Ghosh’s concept of borders and nations has always been a much worked upon area. So, the fourth chapter “Shadow Lines: The Blurring of Boundaries in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh” has chosen to skirt well-known facts about Ghosh’s

fiction scorning the boundaries of nations and genres. Instead this chapter describes how Ghosh erases the boundaries between past, present and future, fact and fiction, centre and margin, land and water in his novels. The chapter discusses how in some of Ghosh's novels certain symbols cross certain lines to occupy a different territory of meaning. Writers like Ramachandra Guha have pointed out how Ghosh's career has 'mocked the Linnaen categories" (451). Compartmentalising things into mutually exclusive criteria is anathema to Ghosh. In his land of accommodations there are no frontiers or boundaries. The chapter shows how his novels spill over these rigid boundaries and offer us a more hybrid vision.

The fifth chapter "The Uncanny: The Unhomely in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh" uses the idea of uncanny put forward by Freud to show how Ghosh uses the strange and uncanny to highlight the interstitial realities of the third space which is neither familiar nor unfamiliar, but a combination of both. Freud defines unheimlich or the uncanny as a word that transforms into its opposite. It becomes a different word which simultaneously means heimlich and unheimlich, canny and uncanny, familiar and unfamiliar, homely and unhomely. The chapter argues that Ghosh's use of the strange or uncanny incidents points at the possibility of a place which is familiar and unfamiliar, homely and unhomely at the same time. In effect, they point at the possibility of a third space which soars above the dichotomies. This chapter discusses Ghosh's technique of creating an uncanny atmosphere using premonitions, ghosts, dreams, fantasies, mirrors and doubling, secrets and silence, death and the literal unhomely. Ultimately, they awaken the readers to the possibility of the third space where they hearken to the plurality of the voices around.

The sixth chapter that wraps up this thesis is the Conclusion. It tells how

Ghosh's fiction has always been vociferous in its reification of the 'cultures of accommodation.' His third space which is an attempt to transcend the binaries of essentialist thinking makes possible the manifestations of multiple identities, multiple realities and multiple voices. Here exclusivity evaporates and inclusivity sets in.

One reason for taking up the theory of postcolonialism is the understanding that only a postcolonial perspective will illuminate the concerns that Ghosh frequently explores through his novels; his postmodernism is a postcolonial postmodernism, his trauma is a postcolonial trauma, his new historicism is all the more postcolonial, even his spectres are postcolonial; Mondal describes the haunting that one sees in Ghosh as a metaphor of colonialism (34). At the same time, he speaks of precolonial times of accommodating cultures and hybridity. He illustrates how the postcolonial concept of 'third space' has actually existed in the precolonial times too. This thesis makes use of postcolonial theory to deal with precolonial, colonial and postcolonial tales and times. A full-length Bhabhaic reading of Ghosh's texts has not appeared so far. And that would place this work in a niche of its own among the plethora of theses written on Ghosh.

As the narrator makes clear about himself in *The Shadow Lines,* it's impossible for a work of Ghosh 'to live without the clamour of the voices within' (67). These are the voices that moor and anchor the writer's and readers' faith in accommodating cultures. They are the reminders of a continuum that weave together the subcontinent's pre-colonial past and postcolonial present. These voices materialize as the slanting twilight that destabilizes the vertical black and white dichotomies and pay homage to the hybrid third space in which they resonate.

Chapter 2

The Medley of Voices: Linguistic Polyphony in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh

> …I saw that very crowd absolutely silent, listening to a man, hardly more than a boy, talk and that too not in one language but in three, four, God knows how many, a khichri of words; couscous, rice, dal and onions, all stirred together, stamped and boiled, Arabic with Hindi, Hindi swallowing Bengali, English doing a dance; tongues unravelled and woven together- nonsense, you say, tongues unravelled are nothing but nonsense- but there again you have a mystery, for everyone understood him, perfectly…. (Ghosh, *The Circle* 300-301)

In *The Circle of Reason* Ghosh makes Alu speak a "khichri' of languages when he is speaking to a cosmopolitan crowd of a majority of Arabic speaking people. He talks to them about the germ, about purity, about dirt and money and in the end the crowd ends up believing in them more than he himself dares to. The passage shows the instinctive polylingualism of the world. Amitav Ghosh in his novels tries to capture this world and record the medley of its voices.

Indian English is known for its chutnification of Queen's English. Khichri as a dish is very dissimilar to chutney. Chutney is a spicy side dish whereas khichri is a nutritious main dish. In this 'khichrification' of language one is to assume that as in a khichri, things stay together without losing any of their flavours. But both the methods are kindred spirits as far as their disavowal of categorical purity is concerned. This khichrification is a technique that Ghosh uses to drive home the

point that for India, multilingualism is a tangible reality that has travelled alongside it right from the pre-colonial times and formed a very unequivocal bonding with it through the colonial and postcolonial periods.

Postcolonial theorisations of language have always been so variegated; language is a means, tool, technique and weapon in the postcolonial world. The text constructs itself through language. The means of asserting one's self through language may be radical like Ngugi's rejection of English. Ngugi writes of his adoption of Gikuyu:

> I believe that my writing in the Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples…. So I would like to contribute towards the restoration of the harmony between all aspects and divisions of language so as to restore the Kenyan child to his environment, understand it fully so as to be in a position to change it for his collective good. (290)

Then there is the less extreme view of Achebe that he advocated in his book *Morning Yet on Creation Day:*

> Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it….I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings. (62)

Brathwaite writes about the experience of English as nation language:

> I think… that English does really have to play a role here- certainly in the Caribbean. But it is an English which is not the standard, imported, educated English, but that of a submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility, which has always been there and which is now increasingly coming to the surface and influencing the perception of contemporary Caribbean people…often it is an English which is like a howl, or a shout or a machine-gun or the wind or a wave. (311)

In a similar vein Raja Rao writes in his foreword to *Kanthapura* how the telling of the story has not been easy:

> One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word 'alien,' yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make up- like Sanskrit or Persian was before- but not of our emotional make-up. We all are instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it. (4)

Chantal Zabus in his essay "Reflexification" writes about a third register:

> This new register of communication, which is neither the European target language nor the indigenous source language, functions as an 'interlanguage'

> or as a 'third register' …. Such a register results from the 'minting,'… 'the re-cutting,'…or 'the fashioning'… of a European based novelistic language wrung out of the African tongue. When reflexified, it's not 'metropolitan' English or French that appears on the page but an unfamiliar European language that constantly suggests another tongue. (315)

This third register, very much similar to Bhabha's concept of the third space, is what we find in Amitav Ghosh. It is a khichri that rises out of the foreign and native tongues. It is a hybrid language which questions the concepts of linguistic purity. It reflects the geopolitical and social realities of the Indian subcontinent. This chapter tries to throw light on the medley of various languages that we find in Ghosh's fiction.

In an interview with Chitra Sankaran, Ghosh speaks about the burden of using English. This is a historical burden and has to do with the imperial assumptions that its usage carries:

> I think writing as we do in English, we have to be very, very careful of the historical burden that English places upon us, because, within English, there is a constant tendency to whitewash the past, in language in the first instance. So, for example, the occupation of Burma is never called the occupation or the brutalization of Burma. In English sources it's always called "pacification." Just as today, in Iraq, the Americans call the occupation "peace making," pacification . . . but it's not. It's an open war of aggression. And you know, while I was writing, I had to struggle with these words...I had to struggle because there's such a weight the English language places upon you to accept these words—to call "pacification," what they call

> "pacification," rather than to call it occupation, the name that it deserves. I realize that even for someone like me, who's so aware of this history, it is still a struggle. (4)

There is always this criticism of using English language to resist and fight back the English. The colonial baggage that a language like English carries is a concern for the postcolonial writer. Ghosh answers this problem through the nationalist Uma in the novel *The Glass Palace*. In the novel Dinu laughs at Uma for using English language. Uma retorts that there are many Jewish writers who are writing in German. But that doesn't prevent them from understanding the truth (295).

Any discussion of the use of English by the postcolonial writers touches upon such concerns. Language becomes something more than a simple means to communicate. It is a tool that develops a technique of its own to be a weapon. As Brathwaite puts it, it becomes a howl. It has certain signals and messages to send around the globe. In that respect Ghosh's kichrified language is another register that speaks a lot in so many words, in so many tongues. As Bhabha points out in *The Location of Culture* it is neither the one, nor the other, but a third that rises out of both.

One of the ideas round which Ghosh situates his fiction is that this cultural and linguistic hybridity is not a result of colonial projects. He talks about how these cultures have been in contact since precolonial times and how they have enriched each other. In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha talks about the "utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity (34). Cultures were never insulated entities wrapped in impermeable foil papers. There were constant dialogues between

them which very rarely took an aggressive tone. Ghosh uses a term like 'the world of accommodation' in *In an Antique Land* when describing the communication between Egypt and India during pre-colonial times. He points out that the problem with us is that we are all 'travelling in the West' forgetting the centuries of dialogue that connected us with many other cultures (194). His novels accommodate several tongues and voices to assert the instinctive polyphony of human cultures.

Bakhtin in *Dialogic Imagination* differentiates 'intentional hybridization' and 'organic hybridization'. Intentional hybridization ironizes as well as unmasks the languages that are combined. The unintentional or organic hybrid offers new world views and helps people perceive the world in words (360). Ghosh uses this technique of organic hybridization. His linguistic experiments serve the purpose of making his readers perceive the world they live in from a different point of view. And the result is an understanding of a 'world of accommodation'.

Fascination with Language

In Ghosh there is always a fascination with language which begins with a fascination with words. He says in an interview with NDTV that he spends time with dictionaries because words interest him. Neel in *Sea of Poppies* is always mindful of the languages he uses. He even attempts to make a dictionary of the pidgin words. In "Ibis Chrestomathy" it is written;

> Words! Neel was of the view that words, no less than people, are endowed with lives and destinies of their own. Why then were there no astrologers to calculate their kismat and pronounce upon their fate? The thought that he might be the one to take on this task probably came to him at about the time when he was first beginning to earn his livelihood as a linkister – that is to

> say during his years in southern China. From then on, for years afterwards, he made it his regular practice to jot down his divinations of the fate of certain words. (1)

Again in *The Circle of Reason* a loom could be seen compared to a 'dictionaryglossarythesaurus.'

> So many words, so many things. On a loom a beam's name changes after every inch…. A loom is a dictionaryglossarythesaurus. Why? Words serve no purpose; nothing mechanical. No, it is because the weaver, in making cloth, makes words, too, and trespassing on the territory of the poets gives names to things the eye can't see. That is why the loom has given language more words, more metaphor, more idiom than all the word's armies of pen-wielders. (79)

In *The Glass Palace* there is a curious case of words fulfilling their duty. King Thebaw who is exiled to Ratnagiri in Burma is looked upon by the people as Ratnagiri's watchful king. It is believed that nothing happens in Ratnagiri without his knowing it. Even though these tales amuse the King, he tries to do justice to them. The novel describes how he seats himself in the balcony of Outram House, unseen by anyone else, but seeing everything: "…time itself had passed into Thebaw's keeping… Thebaw became the town's guardian spirit, a king again" (80).

Ghosh in his novels talks also about the power of words, especially names. In *The Circle of Reason* right after Alu's home bursts into flames the bandy legged Bolai-da stops him from running back to the house. It was Bolai-da who gave Nachiketa Bose the name Alu because of the shape of his head. Bolai-da tells him

that since it was he who named him he would see Alu safe somewhere (160). Alu alias Nachiketa Boss, like his mythical namesake, escapes death more than once.

The Hungry Tide carries the historical detail of the authorities' attempt to build a port in Canning. The port is made on the banks of the river Matla. The meaning of the word 'matla' in Bengali is 'mad'. Henry Piddington, who is an expert on storms, advises the authorities against this project for he knew the madness of the river Matla. They derided him for his misbegotten ideas and continued the construction of the port. Port Canning and the town attached to it were thoroughly swept away by the madness of the river after five years since construction.

Reciprocity of Languages

Ghosh is concerned with the way in which languages influence each other. He thinks denouncing this connection is not natural. He tells Chitra Sankaran in an interview how Bengali was influenced by English:

> But no Bengali can claim that he is dealing with a language that is uncontaminated by English because the fundamental grammatical structure of Bengali has been profoundly altered by English. There was no prose in Bengali until Bengali came into contact with English. The syntactical structure of Bengali is influenced by English. The earliest Bengali magazines and writings were bilingual. They were printed bilingually so you had texts running in Bengali and in English. So the whole invention of Bengali, modern Bengali at least, comes out of this encounter. In fact, there's a deep mutual interconnection. We have to admit it and we have to accept it as a source of strength and richness as opposed to something else. So that's again

> something I would say very strongly about the interconnection between languages. (7)

Sea of Poppies illustrates the way in which a reverse influence takes place; the novel introduces a new tongue which is referred to as 'zubben.' This is the language that the English uses in India. This again is a hybrid language. Ghosh who very systematically translates all other languages when they appear in the novels is very precise about not translating any of these hybrid languages. The American edition of *Sea of Poppies* had come with an appendix of "Ibis Chrestomathy" which is a dictionary of these terms. Other than that, the reader has no safe guides when reading these passages but intuition.

In *Sea of Poppies* Daughty describes 'zubben' to Zachary using zubben.

> The zubben, dear boy, is the flash lingo of the east. It's easy enough to jin if you put your head to it. Just a little peppering of nigger-talk mixed with a few girleys. But mind your Oordoo and Hindee doesn't sound too good: don't want the world to think you've gone native. And don't mince your words either. Mustn't be taken for a chee-chee. (49)

According to Daughty this tongue is to 'gubbrow the natives' (49). Even though it is said so, Daughty uses this kind of talking with the English as well. Throughout the novel Mrs. Burnham speaks in this tongue. So does her little daughter Annabel. She is the one who gives Paulette one of her many names, Puggli. Always confused between identities and languages Paulette constantly makes mistakes which are read as mistakes in decorum by the English. On one such occasion when Paulette ends up badly dressed Annabel cries out; "Mama! She

forgot to bundo her jumma! And oh dekko mama, do: there's her ankle! Do you see it? Look what the puggly's done! (128)"

In an interview with Angola Codacci, Ghosh talks about how languages enrich each other:

> I became very interested in the trading language of southern China – the patois which is known as 'pidgin'. A lot of the south China patois has actually passed into English - e.g. 'Can do/no can do'; or 'Long time no see' etc. A great deal of the Indo-Chinese patois is still preserved in Shanghai and Hong Kong. The word 'Bund' (which is now the name for Shanghai's most famous street) comes from a Hindustani root (meaning 'to tie'); similarly 'nullah'; 'shroff' etc. I am completely fascinated by these linguistic interchanges and admixtures. (12)

Throughout in Ghosh's novels we see such linguistic admixtures and interchanges. This technique serves many purposes. Having a hold over many languages makes his characters confident. Some of them use their languages as a secret weapon, some use them to establish their mastery over the situation, some gain confidence from it, some use it to connect with people and there are some who are disconnected by it, some of them manipulate people with their linguistic skills, some make use of the agency this polylingualism endows them with and some survive on it.

Benefits of Polylingualism

There are many instances in the novels of Ghosh in which a mastery over a different language is used to gain an advantage over others or as a secret weapon. In *The Circle of Reason* the inhabitants of Lalpukur speak a distinct tongue. These

were people who had to migrate from East Bengal to West Bengal. They are said to have carried only their dialect with them which is a mixture of Bengali, Burmese and several tongues of the Eastern hills. The language is described thus:

> It was a nasal sing-song Bengali, with who knew what mixed in of Burmese and the languages of the hills to the East? Many of them had learnt the speech of West Bengal, but it had only made their own dialect more dear to them- as a mark of common belonging and as a secret weapon to confuse strangers with. It was their claim that it was impossible for anyone born outside Noakhali to understand their speech when they spoke fast. (29)

Again in *The Glass Palace* there is the Burmese queen who uses language to establish herself over others. Having been exiled to India she, the King and their children have learnt to use Hindustani fluently. She has been very adamant about dressing only in Burmese clothes. But with regard to language her views are different. So whenever Government officials visit her home-in-exile she puts them at a disadvantage by speaking effortlessly in Hindustani. This is an act of vengeance and a reminder of everything they have been put through.

> British civil servants often spoke Hindustani well and those who didn't had no qualms about answering in English. The Indians, on the other hand, were frequently Parsis or Bengalis… and they were rarely fluent in Hindustani. And unlike their British counterparts they were hesitant about switching languages; it seemed to embarrass them that the Queen of Burma could speak Hindustani better than they. They would stumble and stutter and within minutes she would have their tongues tied in knots. (109)

The Calcutta Chromosome features a next generation super computer named Ava. There is an instance when Antar in the novel realises that what she does actually amounts to dust counting. She sifts through dirt in search of meanings. Antar calls her *addaad al-Turab*, a dust-counter to which she protests multilingually.

> He said it under his breath, but Ava heard him anyway. He could have sworn that she was actually startled: her 'eye,' a laser-guided surveillance camera, swivelled on him while the screen misted over with standby graphics. Then Ava began to spit out translations of the Arabic phrase, going through the world's languages in the declining order of population: Mandarin, Spanish, English, Hindi, Arabic, Bengali… but when it got to the dialects of the Upper Amazon, Antar couldn't bear it any longer. (6)

The blending of languages is used by Ghosh to highlight the confidence of the speaker. As Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks* to take on a language is to take on a world (25). There is an instance in *The Glass Palace* when Arjun, a Bengali uses a mixture of Punjabi and English to describe a hill which awes Dinu, the not-so-easily- awed one.

> …Arjun's vocabulary seemed now to consist mainly of jargon intermixed with assorted bits of English and Punjabi slang… these were not languages with which he had ever thought to associate Arjun. Yet, by the end of Arjun's description, Dinu felt that he could see the hill, in his head. Of those who listened to Arjun's account, he alone was perhaps fully aware of the extreme difficulty of achieving such minuteness of recall and such vividness of description: he was awed…. (276-277)

The manipulative powers of a polyglot are brought to light on many occasions. Moyna in *The Hungry Tide* goes to Kanai babu, the dwibhashi who knows six languages to intervene on her behalf when he translates Piya and Fokir for each other. Whatever that transpires between them should filter through his ears and lips. “Their words will be in your hands and you can make them mean what you will (280),” Moyna says. Zindi in *The Circle of Reason* does magic with her ‘welter of languages.’

> 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, a block of time which was not hours or minutes or days, but something corporeal, with its own malevolent wilfulness. That was Zindi’s power: she could bring together empty air and give it a body just by talking of it. They could never tire of listening to her speak, in her welter of languages, though they knew each word, just as well as they knew lines of song. And when sometimes she chose a different word or a new phrase it was like the pressure of a potter’s thumb on clay- changing the thing itself and their knowledge of it. (228-229)

In the postcolonial world nobody can gainsay the economic advantage of knowing many languages. Kanai in *The Hungry Tide* is in the language business. He had begun with wanting to translate into Arabic the poetry of the Bengali writer Jibanananda which never took off. Instead he turns to translation business. He has an office in Delhi with several employees working under him. He is an authoritative figure looked upon by many in the novel.

In *Sea of Poppies* Neel Rattan Halder, the Raja shorn off his title and powers is sent to Alipore jail convicted in a forgery case. There the English sergeant refuses to acknowledge him when he speaks to him in English. He doesn't reply to his questions and it is then Neel understands the power of language. Neel asks the officer in English if he is not confident enough to speak in English.

> The man's eyes flared and Neel saw that he had nettled him, simply by virtue of addressing him in his own language- a thing that was evidently counted as an act of intolerable insolence in an Indian convict, a defilement of language. The knowledge of this- that even in his present state, stripped of his skin, powerless to defend himself from the hands that were taking an inventory of his body- he still possessed the ability to affront a man whose authority over his person was absolute: the awareness made Neel giddy, exultant, eager to explore this new realm of power…. (289)

This awareness makes him speak continuously in English to the man till he is provoked enough to bark "shut yer gob, quoddie" (290) and hit him with his left hand. To this Neel responds bowing his head and wishing him a good day.

Not knowing other languages has put many of Ghosh's characters in difficult situations. In *The Circle of Reason* there is Kulfi didi who works in a rich household in al-Ghazira with scarcely any knowledge of Arabic. In a disastrous incident she is thrown out of the house because she had interpreted the gestures of her masters wrongly (220). In the same novel there is the police officer Dubey, working in Mahe, who doesn't get salary increments or gratuity because he hasn't passed the departmental language test, which for people in Mahe is in Malayalam (174). In *In an Antique Land* the author is put into a discomfiture every once in a while because

he hasn't yet found the Arabic equivalent of the word 'cremate' and when people ask him about what happens in his part of the world to the dead, he has to say that they are burnt. The listeners, all very pious Muslims, are appalled to the extent of trying to convert him to Islam for his own sake (135).

Knowing many languages is often the key to survival in Ghosh' novels. In *The Circle of Reason* a person like Hajj Fahmy who refuses to hybridize, linguistically, culturally and biologically is doomed to die of shock whereas Zindi, a hybrid of languages and cultures weathers it. Alu the polyglot quite accidentally steps out of his Uncle's house minutes before it bursts into flames. Uma, the Bengali, in El Oued could be seen talking in her own argot of French and Arabic. It's with her that *The Circle of Reason* becomes complete, a woman of science who is accused of not being rational, who prefers not to go by the rules of reason and instead worries only about being human (391). In *The Hungry Tide* there are the illiterate Fokir who loses his life even though heroically and Kanai, the translator, the proud master of six languages, who lives on, even though with the awareness of his fears and cowardice. Rajkumar, the ultimate survivor in *The Glass Palace* speaks English, Bengali, Burmese and Hindi. Neel Rattan Halder of *Sea of Poppies* is a connoisseur of languages. Serang Ali of *Sea of Poppies*, who masterly overcomes many adverse circumstances, also knows a bunch of languages like Arakanese, Chinese, English and Lascari.

Grigson in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is the one who finds out the identity of Ronald Ross' servant Lutchman first. Grigson, a polyglot is part of the Linguistic Survey of India. He knows many dialects of North India and figures that Lutchman's way of speaking doesn't agree with his professed native land. When he finds out that

Lutchman's real name should be Laakhan, Lutchman sees the threat in him and tries to liquidate him. Grigson survives this attempt and flees the place. But another one who understood that something sneaky goes behind all the scenes was Farley, who ends up being run over by the train in Renupur station.

In *The Glass Palace* when King Thebaw with his family is transported to Ratnagiri the manner in which they overcome this humiliation is portrayed vividly. They very simply adapt. This adaptation is shown as their manner of retort. Both the King and the Queen learn the native tongue and the next generation is shown as more adaptive. The princesses learn Hindusthani and Marathi and they speak them as fluently as the townsfolk. They speak to their parents in their mother tongue as well (77).

In an interview with Chitra Sankaran, Ghosh talks about the ability of a bilingual to be richer. This richness may be the literal richness of people like Kanai in *The Hungry Tide* or figurative richness of Alu in *The Circle of Reason*. A bilingual writer has more access to the plurality of the world (8). Knowing many languages is said to give the possessor an edge over the situations. Polyglots like Alu in *The Circle of Reason* always triumph. It is said of Alu that by the age of ten he learned to speak Bengali, English, French, Hindi and even the dialect of the village which his uncle Balaram hasn't learnt even after staying at the place for sixteen years. Balaram perishes and Alu survives. The illiterate Fokir in *The Hungry Tide* sacrifices his life where as Kanai who boasts of knowing six languages continues to live.

Langauges that Connect and Disconnect

The ability of language to connect and disconnect also is something that interests Amitav Ghosh. In *The Shadow Lines* Ila's mother in Sri Lanka talks to the Sinhalese ayah, Lizzie, in a language of her own intervention. She sticks to this language even though everybody knows that Lizzie knows to speak and understand English and even a little Hindi. This way of talking is her strategy to mark certain boundaries. This language looks like a pidgin with its meagre vocabulary and no grammar. She asks Lizzie when she sees a crocodile in her garden: "Lizzie, what it-thing being-being?... No Possible… it-thing killing-killing?" (26). Lizzie has great difficulty to decode the meaning and once she does that she responds in plain English. On the other hand, the same crocodile instills a familial feeling in Ila's mother once it responds to her questions.

> Then, drawing on her last reserves of courage, she managed to mutter to it-Eating-eating nice veggie-veggies? - which was only her Lizzie-language turned inside out, but the animal's tail seemed to flicker in answer and from that moment onwards she considered it a part of her household: she was always at ease with anything and anybody who would respond to one of her private dialects. (26)

Jodu and Putli in *Sea of Poppies* are connected and separated by language. Putli, in fact is the Bangla version of the French name Paulette. Paulette and Jodu were brought up together by Jodu's mother. Both of them use Bangla as the primary language. They were almost similar till they began to learn to write. Paulette is more attracted towards books and learning while Jodu doesn't like to read at all. He is lured away by the attraction of the river while Paulette thinks that she hasn't got

enough time to read. The novel describes how this intrusion of the language weakened the bond between them (68).

The Hungry Tide discusses the power of language to seep in to different people and times to connect them. Nirmal in *The Hungry Tide* talks about the skill of the tide country to erase the past. “There is nothing I can do to stop what lies ahead. But I was once a writer; perhaps I can make sure at least that what happened here leaves some trace, some hold on the memory of the world. The thought of this has made it possible…to put my pen to paper again…. In this time, I will try to write what I can in the hope that somehow these words will find their way to you” (74).

In *In an Antique Land* there is a crafty policeman who manages to terrorize the innocent, rustic taxi driver Mohsin by using Mohsin’s rural dialect. Listening to this dialect Mohsin tries to befriend the policeman. But the latter uses the familiar language to turn down the familiar terms of communication. The highly clipped official usage of the dialect unnerves Mohsin (281).

Neel Rattan Halder in *Sea of Poppies* tries to establish a connection with his cell mate, the half Indian-half Chinese Ah Fatt, by asking him his name in English. Ah Fatt doesn’t reply instantly. But Neel understands that his was not a refusal to reply, but simply a postponement of reply. Neel makes it a ritual to ask the same question every day. He is sure that one day he will get an answer. In the end Ah Fatt replies at a very crucial time, the night before their departure to Mauritius. Neel is torn by nightmares and it is then that Ah Fatt hugs him and tells him his name. Then his sound was like music to Neel’s ears.

Ava, the super computer in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is programmed to switch between languages, dialects and intonations. It speaks to Antar in his rural

dialect which greatly disturbs him for he had left his village at a very young age and now holds a very tenuous connection with it. At times he is unable to understand Ava as it speaks his mother tongue. Sometimes it would remind him of an old relative and to escape from it Antar would step out of his home (13).

Again in *Sea of Poppies* there is a long description of Paulette writing the name of Zachary Reid on the place-cards. Paulette is drawn towards him after meeting him on the Ibis and the prospect of seeing him again for the dinner is highly exciting to her. She keeps on polishing the loops and curves of the name. The letter 'Z' troubles her a lot. She thinks of the multiple possibilities of writing that letter. She even tries to knot it with her initial 'P' (211).

People who undergo a linguistic crisis in Ghosh's corpus of novels are also people who undergo an identity crisis. They endure obstacles when they try to connect with the people around them. In *Sea of Poppies* there is Paulette, a French girl who is brought up as an Indian, who uses Bangla as her primary language. When she is in the Burnham household with her adoptive family, she could be seen inviting ridicule whenever she uses English. She always uses the wrong words or the wrong idiom which raises many eyebrows. Whenever she can't find the right English word, she anglicises the French equivalent thus mangling her sentence. In the novel there is Baboo Nob Kissin who doesn't like being called his real name Nobokrishna Babu. He prefers the anglicised variety and uses a much-rusticated English which is borderline comical. Even when people talk to him in Bangla he responds in his own variety of 'chaste English' which sounds like 'Lambert sahib only give' (134) and 'Master waiting waiting, all the time breaking my head and collaring me' (139) etc. Baboo Nob Kissin Pander also is going through an identity

crisis and is on his way to fulfil the destiny of his body to become a woman. In *The Hungry Tide* Piya who is neither an American nor a Bengali is portrayed as an androgynous girl who has very poor language skills. She is an eternal traveller who hasn't learnt any other language than English. Even her mother tongue Bangla is an alien language to her, because the little of what she acquired from her parents was deliberately forgotten by her since her parents always fought in Bangla. The language meant a torn household to her.

Pidgins and Creativity

Linguistic hybridity is an indicator of creativity as well. Ghosh has illustrated how very creative people can be in a diaspora regarding their medium of communication. In *In an Antique Land* Ghosh speculates about a pidgin language called 'Lariyya'. Indian Ocean is a multilingual expanse which wouldn't allow the traders to live by any tongue that is native to any set of traders.

> …to function at all the language of everyday business would have had to be both simpler and much more widely dispersed than any ordinary language…it seems likely that the problem was solved by using a trading argot, or an elaborate pidgin language. The Arab geographer Masudi refers to a language called Lariyya, which he describes as being spoken along much of the length of the Malabar coast. Since no language corresponding to that name is known to exist it is possible that he was referring to a pidgin.… (231)

This pidgin language is said to have been in circulation centuries before Europe ventured to make its imperialist dream come true. Later when the colonial enterprises resulted in the creation of utilitarian languages like pidgins, it is said that

these hybrids ironised and unmasked the power hierarchy. Robert Young writes of pidgin as a contact language that subverts the colonizer- colonised relationship in *Colonial Desire.*

> Pidgin and creolized languages constitute powerful models because they preserve the real historical forms of cultural contact. The structure of pidgin- crudely, the vocabulary of one language superimposed on the grammar of another—suggests a different model from that of a straightforward power relation of dominance of colonizer over colonized. Today this structural device is often repeated in novels in English so that the vernacular idiom tacitly decomposes the authority of the metropolitan form. (5)

In *Sea of Poppies* Ghosh recreates the peculiar language spoken in the Gangetic region during the 1850s. Ghosh tries to introduce his version of the Lascari language which is thought to have been spoken in the Indian Ocean by the traders, ship hands and officers. Lascars are seamen of different nationalities. Lascari is a medley of many languages and is described as a 'motley tongue'.

> Lascari- that motley tongue, spoken nowhere but on the water, whose words were as varied as the port's traffic, an anarchic medley of Portuguese calaluzes and Kerala pattimars, Arab booms and Bengal paunch-ways, Malay proas and Tamil catamarans, Hindustani pulwars and English snows- yet beneath the surface of this farrago of sound, meaning flowed as freely as the currents beneath the crowded press of boats. (104)

In the novel Zachary Reid who is in charge of the ship's stores has to familiarize himself with a new set of words.

> …he had to learn to say ‘resum’ instead of ‘rations’, and he had to wrap his tongue around words like ‘dal’, ‘masala’ and ‘achar’. He had to get used to ‘malum’ instead of mate, and ‘seacunny’ for helmsman; he had to memorize a new ship vocabulary, which sounded a bit like English and yet not: the rigging became the ‘ringeen’, ‘avast!’ was ‘bas!’, and the cry of the middle-morning watch went from ‘ all’s well’ to ‘alzbel’. (15)

Yet the American Zachary Reid doesn’t find it difficult to understand this language when he is spoken to in it by Serang Ali. It is said that this new language unloosed Zachary’s tongue (16). In an interview with Angola Codacci Ghosh talks about how his research for *Sea of Poppies* made him wonder about the language of the Indian Ocean.

> When I was researching *Sea of Poppies* I looked at a lot of old crew lists, from 19th century ships. These crews were often incredibly diverse, with sailors from East Africa, the Gulf, Somalia, Persia, India, China. It made me wonder how these crewmen, who were all known as ‘lascars’, communicated with each other. It struck me that this must have been an especially pressing issue on a sailing vessel, for it is impossible to work a sail ship without clear commands – that’s why there’s such an extensive nautical jargon in English. So how did lascars communicate, with their officers (who were usually European) and with each other? These questions puzzled me for a long time and then one day, while looking through a library catalogue, I came upon a 19th century dictionary of the ‘Laskari’ language. I’d never seen any references to this dictionary anywhere, so it was a really exciting discovery. And the language proved to be a wonderful nautical jargon that mixed bits of

> Hindi, Urdu, English, Portuguese, Bengali, Arabic, Malay and many other languages. It was fascinating for me personally because it incorporated elements of many of the languages I grew up with. (14)

In *In an Antique Land* the author is seen discussing Ben Yiju's language. Ben Yiju is a symbol of a pre-colonial cosmopolitanism. Ben Yiju travels from Egypt to Mangalore and stays on in Mangalore for some two decades. He marries a Nair woman and begets children with whom he travels back to Egypt. The author assumes that Ben Yiju must have conversed with his wife in a pidgin language. Of Ben Yiju's writings it is written that "Ben Yiju's documents were mostly written in an unusual hybrid language: one that has such an arcane sound to it that it might well be an entry in a book of Amazing Facts" (78).

Words across Borders

Ghosh engages in etymological discussions throughout his novels. The words which cross several linguistic borders are brought to light. In *The Circle of Reason* there is a lengthy description of the origins of the word 'cotton'

> So many languages, like German with its *baumwolle,* are condemned for ever to the blinkers that bound Sennacherib and Herodotus to think of cotton as a misbegotten wool. But even the English were handed down their word, like so much else that raised them to civilization, by the Arabs, from their *kutn*…. But the Arabs took their own word from the Akkadian *kitinu*. And there they had lost the battle already, for that word came from *kitu,* in the same language, which meant nothing but dreary flax. (60)

In *In an Antique Land*, the origins of the word 'Masr' is discussed. 'Masr' is an ancient word that stands for Cairo as well as Egypt and derives from a root with a meaning 'to settle', 'to civilize.'

> The word has a long history in Arabic; it occurs in the Quran but was in use even before the advent of Islam. It is the name by which the country has been known, in its own language, for at least a millennium, and most of the cultures and civilizations with which it has old connections have accepted its own self-definition. The languages of India, for example, know Masr by variations of its Arabic name: 'Mishor' in Bengali, 'Misar' in Hindi and Urdu. (18)

In *The Hungry Tide* there is a discussion on the word 'badabon' which Nirmal chooses for his wife Neelima's Trust.

> Badabon was a word Nirmal loved…like the English 'bedouin' badabon derived from the Arabic *badiya*, which means 'desert'. 'But "Bedouin" is merely an anglicising of Arabic,' he said to Nilima, 'while our Bangla word joins Arabic to Sanskrit- 'bada' to 'bon' or 'forest'. It was as though the word itself was an island, born of the meeting of two great rivers of language…. (87)

In "Ibis Chrestomathy" Ghosh talks about how modern lexicons are products of linguistic and cultural hybridity and how they fail to acknowledge this fact. The origins of the entries in Chrestomathy are traced and long descriptions regarding the etymology follow. 'The Oracle' in the passage cited below stands for Oxford English Dictionary.

> It remains only to explain that since the Chrestomathy deals exclusively with the English language, Neel included, with very few exceptions, only such words as had already found a place in an English dictionary, lexicon or word-list. This is why its entries are almost always preceded either by the symbol of the Oracle (a +) or by the names of other glossaries, dictionaries or lexicons: these are, as it were, their credentials for admittance to the vessel of migration that was the Chrestomathy. However the power to grant full citizenship rested, in Neel's view, solely with the Oracle (thus his eagerness to scrutinize its rolls). Once a word had been admitted into the Oracle's cavern, it lost the names of its sponsors and was marked forever with its certificate of residence: the +. "After the Oracle has spoken the name of a word, the matter is settled: from then on the expression in question is no longer (or no longer only) Bengali, Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Laskari or anything else – in its English incarnation, it is to be considered a new coinage, with a new persona and a renewed destiny.(2)

The Inevitability of Linguistic Hybridity

Many a time in his novels Ghosh could be seen using different languages side by side. In *The Circle of Reason* each section is named with a Sanskrit word and its English equivalent. "Satwa: Reason", "Rajas: Passion" and "Tamas: Death." In *The Hungry Tide* the two sections are "The Ebb: Bhata" and "The Flood: Jowar". In *Sea of Poppies* there is the instance a clerk chastising Deeti: "you people always come here and talk about being hungry, but tell me, who's ever seen a peasant starve? You just like to complain all the time khichir- michir…" (155). This clerk is a Bengali whose native tongue is Bhojpuri. But when talking to Deeti he uses an

urbanised Hindi and the word khichir michir which is not even italicised is Bengali which means chatter. Mrs Aratounian, the Armenian in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is thought to be an incarnation of Mangala bibi. It is said that even after being in Calcutta for so many years she doesn't know Bengali. But in the occult practice of presiding over the ceremony of Mangala bibi entering a new body she could be heard using rustic archaic Bengali.

In *The Glass Palace* we see Burmese and English side by side. "What is it? *Ba le*?" and Rajkumar answering in his heavily accented fluent Burmese that it is English cannon. Rajkumar's father used to work as a 'dwibhashi.' In *The Hungry Tide* there is a plaintive haunting cry of the refugees in Morichjhapi island as they are followed by the police when traversing the river. Police fire gunshots into the sky and scream into the loud speakers coaxing the settlers to turn back. Nirmal records their reaction with wonder, because they do something that was not predictable, that was unforeseen. They begin to shout together; " Amra kara? Basthuhara. Who are we? We are the dispossessed" (275).

On many occasions Ghosh talks about the inevitability of linguistic hybridity. In *The Hungry Tide* Nirmal's notebook carries a description of the puja at Bon Bibi's temple. The mantra that Horen recites is in a hybrid language: "Bismillah boliya mukhey dhorinu kalam/ poida korilo jinni tamam alam baro meherban tini Bandar upore/taar chhani keba ache duniyar upore" (265). Nirmal listens to this with astonishment because he was expecting a Hindu ceremony. But the strange language of the mantra enthrals him because it still had the rhythm of recitation at a Hindu puja; only the language was an odd mixture of Bangla, interspersed with Arabic and Persian.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome* there is an instance in which the German spiritualist Countess Pongracz is recounting her séances. She writes them in great excitement shortly after the sessions:

> Often in these situations, the impeccable High German in which her accounts were composed would begin to show signs of strain; sometimes her beleaguered sense of syntax would yield altogether, and instead of complete sentences she would jot down strings of apparently disconnected syllables. Intensive computer analysis has demonstrated that these phonemic clusters were drawn from a melange of Central European dialects such as Slovenian, and certain unusual Carpathian variants of Finno-Ugrian. (179)

Cairo's Geniza plays a major role in *In an Antique Land*. Geniza evolves out of a reverential attitude towards the written word. Jews, in order to prevent the inadvertent defilement of any writings of God's name, deposit papers, scrolls, letters, legal documents and books inside the Geniza. The contents of Geniza are very piously buried. Cairo's Geniza became the chalice for a lot of academic treasure hunters. Geniza is a site of linguistic hybridity. Inside it there were documents in Aramaic, Hebrew, Arabic, Judeo-Arabic etc. The last document in Geniza is a divorce settlement from India in 1875.

Shombhu Debnath in *The Circle of Reason* points out to Alu the parts of a loom. He can't speak because his tongue is knotted with words. "So many names, so many words, words beaten together in the churning which created the world: Tangail words, stewed with Noakhali words, salted with Naboganj words, boiled up with English…. To survive a man must pour out words…" (79). He names different parts of the loom for Alu: "Kol-norod, Shombhu shouts, pointing with his cane. Kol-

norod in Noakhali, nata-norod in Tangail, cloth beam in English. Then his cane switches to the other end of the loom: bhim-norod in Noakhali, pancha-narod in Tangail, warp beam in English" (79).

In *The Calcutta Chromosome* Murugan tells the boy who keeps on stalking him that he doesn't want his help to change dollars, when he persists he tells him in many tongues the same thing: "how many ways do you want me to say it: no, na, nahin, nyet, nothing, nix" (36). He uses English, Hindi and Russian to add vehemence to his refusal.

There is a description of the hybridity of a language like Judeo-Arabic used by Jews in Egypt in *In an Antique Land* "…everyone who wrote Judeo-Arabic had a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures…their prose is studded with Hebrew proverbs and long passages from the Bible, as well as legal and religious terms from the archaic language Aramaic" (79).

Clamouring Voices

On many occasions in Ghosh's novels there is a literal medley of voices. In *The Shadow Lines* there is an instance in which the narrator listens to the voices inside him discussing whether to go and meet Ila.

> Then I would walk halfway across the bridge, lean on the railing and think of reasons why I should not go on: that it was too far, the rain would get worse before I got there, I had already been there twice that week, Ila wouldn't be at home anyway…. I would carry on this argument with perfect ingenuousness, as though I were merely eavesdropping on a conversation between two old friends. (95)

Dolly in *The Glass Palace* takes an ailing Dinu to the hospital and it is later confirmed that Dinu has polio. Dolly spends weeks inside the hospital and this stay transforms her entire being. She awakens to a new sense of karuna listening to the multitude of voices around her.

> In hospital, at night, lying in bed with Dinu, she'd found herself listening to voices that were inaudible during the day: the murmurs of anxious relatives; distant screams of pain; women keening in bereavement. It was as though the walls turned porous in the stillness of the night…. The more she listened to those voices, the more directly they spoke to her…. (210)

In *The Circle of Reason* the first part 'Satwa: Reason' ends with the blending of Professor Samuel's and Zindi's voices.

> Professor Samuel in some distant part of the boat, voice high with excitement- you see Chunni, I only realized too late that it was I who was wrong, not the shopkeepers, not the obstetricians, but I; and then Zindi spent and fighting for her wind- Never again, don't dare, don't dare try this again, don't ever dare look at me again; and somewhere else- Do you understand that Chunni? I was wrong because there aren't any queues there, it's near those lights that the queues are, because there aren't any queues without money; and Zindi's hot breath again- And don't ever talk about this in al-Ghazira, not if you want to live…. (203)

In *Sea of Poppies* there is a debate inside Baboo Nob Kissin's head between the worldly gumusta, and the maternal Taramony. The voice of Taramony would ask him to go down and meet her adopted son, Neel Rattan Halder. The worldly gomusta would protest saying that he couldn't go like that, he is afraid of what

people would think. Then Taramony would respond that he could do anything he likes, because he is the ship's supercargo (424).

The Agency of Voice

Voices are not merely auditory experiences for Ghosh. *The Calcutta Chromosome* explains the agency of voice through Murugan:

> Same stimulus, different responses: he says tamatar and you say tamatim. Now think, what if the "im" and the "ar" could be switched between you and him? What would you have then? You'd have him speaking, in your voice, or the other way around. You wouldn't know whose voice it was. And isn't it the scariest thing there is Ant? …. For if you don't know who's saying something, you don't know why they are saying it either. (94)

In an Antique Land describes the tumultuous times that Ghosh had lived through when he was in Dhaka. The precincts of his house in Dhaka offer shelter to many Hindu refugees who are trying to flee to India as East Pakistan was becoming Bangladesh. People flock there because theirs was the only 'Hindu' house nearby with high walls. Once there was an angry mob of Muslims outside their house with flaming torches thronging together in response to similar riots in India with the hunter and haunted roles reversed. Ghosh talks about the mirrored tales of Hindus and Muslims helping each other out even at the peril of their own lives. He says that telling these stories again and again helps the people regain their sanity; "for it is the incantation that redeems our sanity" (171). Here again the agency of voice and its restorative properties are brought out.

In *Sea of Poppies* while Ibis is leaving for Mauritius Neel asks Ah Fatt to describe his village in China. Neel is so devastated by the prospect of leaving the

known world behind that he is afraid that he will lose his sanity. It is Ah Fatt's description of Canton that preserves Neel's sanity. "Thus it happened that while the Ibis was still on the Hooghly, Neel was transported across the continent, to Canton- and it was this other journey… that kept his sanity intact…" (375).

The Glass Palace carries a conversation between Arjun and Colonel Buckland before Arjun joins the Indian National Army. Arjun recalls one of Buckland's lectures while they were in the NDA in which he talked about how it will be the Indian soldiers who will fight for India's independence long before civilians even think of it. At that time Arjun and the other Indian soldiers took umbrage at being told so and thought that the Colonel was trying to provoke them. But during their sojourns in Singapore and Malaya their eyes open to the mercenary nature of their lives and Arjun remembers the Colonel's lecture. He says that if they were to return to the British Indian Army, Buckland would be shocked by it and he would even despise them for doing that.

In *The Glass Palace* when Rajkumar and Dolly bring the orphaned baby Jaya into Manju's ancestral home the baby is described as crying at the top of its voice. Both Rajkumar and Dolly are spent after the tedious and tortuous journey and Rajkumar is seen kneeling on the pavement holding out the baby who suddenly starts to scream: "at that moment the world held no more beautiful sound than this utterance of rage: this primeval sound of life proclaiming its determination to defend itself" (478).

Again in *The Glass Palace* there is Dinu sitting in his studio 'Glass Palace' talking about the agency of language. He says that in Myanmar ordinary language serves no purpose. The alternate means of communication is learning secret

languages. In a closely surveilled state even photography becomes a secret language. Talking about photography in simple Burmese they talk about politics and the need for a change (509).

Nirmal Bose in *The Hungry Tide* is seen writing on the morning of the tragic Morichjhapi incident. He equates himself to Scheherazade who tries to preserve her life by telling stories. All his life Nirmal had time in his hands but never wrote a word. Now caught between an uncertainty of life and death he writes, hoping that his words would reach out to Kanai. He writes against the dying of the light. He writes in his notebook, "now like some misplaced, misgendered Scheherazade, I am trying to stave the night off with a flying fleeting pen" (157).

There are different types of silences in Ghosh's fiction. One is the cryptic silence of *The Calcutta Chromosome* which is discussed in Chapter Five. Another is a silence which camouflages things; Ghosh speaks of this in his correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty:

> …in the broadest possible sense, could it not be said, that all addas, and indeed all (native) discourse in imperial India were shaped to a greater or lesser degree by the ever-present fear of intervention? Certainly, in reading B. C. Pal or Tilak or Lajpat Rai, it is evident that they were always conscious of the hand of the state and the possible consequences for themselves and their families. Is it thus possible, even, to embark on a project of recovering 'Indian' visions of modernity under imperialism? For the traces of such thought that were actually committed to paper, were, I suspect, always those that were the least compromising from a legal point of view. The visions that were articulated 'seditiously' would almost by definition be excluded from the

> project. It is worth noting that in most instances of insurrection, Indians (and Burmese) were very careful to shroud their projects in silence. (14)

He talks about the difficulty of unearthing documents that register protest against those in power. Again, we see him talking about this in an interview with Chitra Sankaran:

> …if you look back on Indian history, 1857 is surrounded in silence . . . there are so many sorts of events which are just constantly, as it were, wrapped in silence. This whole mass march out of Burma is wrapped in silence. So yes, it does interest me very much, especially as a writer, you know you're in the business of producing words and there's a kind of paradox when you're addressing something which is explicitly silent, I think. So I do find that's something very intriguing. (8)

Ghosh writes about silences in *The Shadow Lines*. He talks about his battle with silence which is an elusive entity. It is an emptiness, Ghosh says, a gap, a hole which contains no words. He writes about the happenings of 1964 after a long tussle with silence (218). Ghosh contests silences of this kind with his voices that pinch the corner of the curtain, and hold it up to make visible things that have been pushed into the partial obliteration it offered.

In *In an Antique Land* there is a discussion between the Imam and Ghosh which ends up with them railing at each other. Even though both of them were speaking in Arabic, Ghosh feels that they don't have a language to discuss their difference, "it seemed to me that the Imam and I had participated in our own final defeat, in the dissolution of the centuries of dialogue that had linked us…" (194). He criticises colonialism for hijacking the languages of peaceful discussions.

Ghosh in *In an Antique Land* talks about the linguistic and cultural hybridity which have been here from precolonial times and are not the after-effects of imperialistic projects. Imperialism has obliterated the languages of accommodation which spoke of business, poetry and love at the same time. Ben Yiju, the Jewish businessman residing in Mangalore thinks of poetry and the letters he writes and receives talk of intimacy, kinship and business. In *The Hungry Tide* the egalitarianism of a polylinguistic community is brought to light;

> …the mudbanks of the tide country are shaped not only by rivers of silt, but also by rivers of language: Bengali, English, Arabic, Hindi, Arakanese and who knows what else? Flowing into each other they create a proliferation of small worlds that hang suspended in the flow… tide country's faith is something like one of its great mohonas, a meeting not just of many rivers, but a circular roundabout people can use to pass in many directions- from country to country and between faiths and religions. (267)

In *The Glass Palace* there is a debate between Dinu and his wife regarding the use of so many dialects and languages in one's work. Dinu's wife who is a creative writer says that "a word on a page is like the string of an instrument. My readers sound the music in their head, and for each it sounds different" (533). Creating music with words is a challenge for every original writer. Ghosh builds up a hybrid narrative language of his own to reflect the polyphony which has existed from the prehistoric trade routes onwards.

In "Finding Oneself on Board the "Ibis" in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*" Rudrani Gangopadhyay mentions the sea of languages inside Ibis. "Like all other barriers within the jahaji relatives, the linguistic barriers too dissolve as hybrid

languages come up" (61). Hybrid languages make communication possible. After the times of the mythic Babel this is the human beings' attempt to build up a universe where each one is understood. Gangopadhyay writes again:

> Ghosh blends the languages of characters into his narrative, throwing light on human relationships and the way in which they transcend divisions drawn by languages, among other things. While Ghosh's tactic is masterful, it is not just a linguistic choice but also a political one, and unites everyone no matter where they come from by means of one language that belongs to no one in particular but belongs to everyone as they also find their voice in this tongue. (62)

Shameem Black in his *Fiction Across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late-Twentieth-Century Novels* writes about Amitav Ghosh's concern with language. He talks about how the language of English in Ghosh's fiction loses its aesthetic privilege:

> Ghosh focuses attention on the particular problem of representing linguistic difference, asking how a novel written in English might ethically reflect the nuances of translingual, multilingual, and even antilingual experience in South Asia and Southeast Asia. Given the history of English as an imperial and neoimperial language, Ghosh's fiction invites us to consider that English may need to renounce elements of its own aesthetic privilege before it can accommodate these different forms of expression. (17)

Peter Morey and Alex Tickell in their introduction to *Alternative Indias: Writing, Nation and Communalism* refer to Ghosh's essay "The Diaspora in Indian Culture," which says that the fact of Indians' adaptation to heteroglossia is the

reiteration of our disenchantment with borders and ideas of purity (30). Regarding why he uses English as his medium Vikram Seth once said in an interview with *Le Monde*:

> English is the language I know best. I was born in Calcutta in 1952, after independence, but, I do not speak Bengali. Hindi is my mother tongue; I learned Urdu; my father speaks Punjabi and Hindi; my mother who was the first Indian woman to become a judge also speaks Bengali because she studied at Calcutta university.
>
> In a country like India being a polyglot is a very normal thing and it is this normalcy that Ghosh tries to unveil through his novels. Ghosh in his letter to Sandra Vince of Commonwealth Foundation explains his refusal of the Commonwealth Prize:
>
> As a grouping of nations collected from the remains of the British Empire, the Commonwealth serves as an umbrella forum in global politics. As a literary or cultural grouping however, it seems to me that 'the Commonwealth' can only be a misnomer so long as it excludes the many languages that sustain the cultural and literary lives of these countries. (It is surely inconceivable, for example, that the athletes would have to be fluent in English in order to qualify for the Commonwealth Games).

Ghosh includes these 'languages that sustain the cultural and literary lives' of his country in his novels. In an interview with *UN Chronicle* Amitav Ghosh equated the development of novel with the rise of monolingualism in Europe. He says that his writing met with comments like "what you are doing is very peculiar because you are writing in languages other than those you spoke at home" in Europe. He

adds that everybody has to deal with multilinguality (48). In writings like “The Diaspora in Indian Culture” Ghosh talks about heteroglossia as a characteristic of Indian culture (78). In his “Postmodernism and the Rest of the World” R. Radhakrishnan, says that Ghosh has a “strategy of polyvocality and heteroglossia that is much more multi-historical than the kind of metropolitan ventriloquism one finds in the works of Salman Rushdie” (61).Heteroglossia in Ghosh is a strategy and not a mere fascination.

In *Routledge Handbook of Multilingualism* Suresh Canagarajah and Indika Liyanage write about the polylingual nature of South Asia in an article titled "Lessons from Pre-Colonial Multilingualism.” They write that in precolonial India linguistic diversity has been so rich that the researchers are at a loss to understand it (52). They write about how the modernist scholarship “has disregarded the fact that in Indian subcontinent communities using different linguistic codes lived in harmony for hundreds... of years, before they witnessed forces of colonialism in modern history” (53). K. Satchidanandan talks of the globalised Indian childhood he had in his editorial to Indian literature.

> I was born into a globalised language and grew up in a globalised world. Malayalam, my mother tongue, has borrowed words and expressions from languages all over the globe, from Portuguese, French and Dutch to Persian, Arabic and Hindi. In fact there is a whole version of the language popularly called 'Arabic-Malayalam' in which the melodious Moplah songs are written. Our first dictionary was produced by a German missionary, Herman Gundert by name and missionaries from abroad continued to contribute to the language and its grammar. Our first printing press too was established by the

> Basel Mission. One of the earliest books in the language is a travelogue detailing an arduous voyage undertaken by a priest to Rome. The place where I was born, Kodungallur, famed as Muziris in the old Arab records, was once an international port and trading centre where the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Dutch and Portuguese, had arrived for exchanging goods. (5)

Satchidanandan goes on to talk about how as children their favourite haunts were a Portuguese fort, a church established by St. Thomas and a mosque built by a Chera king who after being converted to the religion of Islam died in Arabia during a pilgrimage (5).This is a culture that was largely globalised even before the formal entry of Globalisation into the world.

It is the duty of the postcolonial writers to remember the pre-colonial legacies and heritage of their nation and also to remind their readers of it. The medley of voices we listen to in Ghosh is an attempt to earmark these pages in the book of our history as seen in *In an Antique Land*. In *Sea of Poppies*, *The Calcutta Chromosome* and *The Glass Palace* it acquires the form of a strategy during the colonial times. In the postcolonial world of *The Shadow Lines* or *The Hungry Tide* or *The Circle of Reason* it is the tasty and nutritious khichri that phenomenally questions the concept of categorical essentialism. The Indian reader of Ghosh's novels listens to the medley of voices which makes itself heard in Bengali, Hindi, Arabic, Bhojpuri, Burmese, Hindustani, Chinese, Cantonese, Malayalam, English, Chinese Pidgin English, Laskari, Mauritian creole, Judeo –Arabic with an enlightening understanding of our culture's instinctive polylingualism.

Chapter 3

Jahazbhais and Jahazbahens: Hybrid Spaces in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh

> On a boat of pilgrims, no one can lose caste and everyone is the same: it's like taking a boat to the temple of Jagannath, in Puri. From now on, and forever afterwards, we will all be ship siblings- *jahaz-bhais* and *jahaz-bahens*- to each other. There will be no difference between us. (Ghosh, *Sea* 356)

'Jahaz-bhais and jahaz-bahens' is a curiously hybrid 'Hinglish' word and in the novel *Sea of Poppies* it is uttered by a curiously hybrid French woman named Paulette Lambert alias Pugli alias Putleshwari. She is an example of a European gone native. She is comfortable in saris, bathes daily, speaks Bangla and is miserably lacking in etiquette if assessed by the British standards as the Burnhams do in the novel. She changes like a shape shifter, has a very fluid identity which makes Zachary Reid call her a chameleon (500). Paulette once asks Neel, "Is it forbidden for a human being to manifest themselves in many different aspects?" (496). Amitav Ghosh offers his characters spaces to manifest themselves and these hybrid spaces form the core of this chapter.

In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha writes:

> …the theoretical recognition of the split space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is

> the ‘inter’- the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space- that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. (38)

Throughout the introductory essay in *The Location of Culture* Bhabha makes references to this in-between space. He defines cultural hybridity as not just cultural diversity; he says that it entertains differences. “This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (5). These cultural interstices offer possibilities of creative intervention as Bhabha writes again in *The Location of Culture*: “Once again, it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence” (9).

In her “Amitav Ghosh's World Histories from Below” Antoinette Burton writes about Ghosh’s universe.

> Ghosh’s ecumenes are raucously inhabited, fully-embodied worlds through which characters hurtle, and in so doing, shape the territorial limits and possibilities of the landscapes they traverse. In *The Glass Palace* Ghosh resutured the history of Burma to larger South Asian histories; in *The Hungry Tide* he rethought the role of the Sundarban archipelago and “the maw of the tides” in sub continental narratives of modernity and urbanism. In *Sea of Poppies*, he draws India, China, Britain, and North America together in the port of Calcutta and on the deck of the Ibis, a transport ship destined for Mauritius. This is the vibrant, polyglot, cosmopolitan world of Bengal Presidency that we scarcely see in contemporary scholarship, despite recent work arguing for its role in “global concept history.” Such swirling eddies—of language, identity, color, class, and religion—are also rarely visible in

> transnational histories, except those which take riverways and ocean deeps seriously, which is to say, as equivalent to (if not the same as) those forms of sovereign territory that are the ballast of empires and their histories. (74)

Rushdie in his "In Defense of the Novel, Yet Again" comments on the postcolonial novel as a trans-cultural and decentred hybrid. Doris Bachmann-Medick in *Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture* writes of hybridity and interstitial places:

> Hybridity emphasizes the reciprocal interactions between different, even antagonistic, cultures and subcultures while giving enhanced status to practices of creolization and syncretism and to the previously neglected sites of cultural production. Linked to the postcolonial shift of the center-periphery axis, it represents a new understanding of cultural dynamics. Instead of placing this idea of cultural dynamics at the center of systems of cultural meaning – as was the case with the interpretive turn with its assumptions of cultural consensus – the concept of hybridity views marginal, border and overlapping zones, as well as interstitial spaces, as culturally productive. It sees the "displacements" that result from global networks and interdependencies as especially useful. (142)

In her essay Antoinette Burton talks about the segregation of history and literature that took place in the nineteenth century for setting up the curricula of universities. As a result, history was seen as a positive, male and public thing and fiction was cast in a sentimental light. It was deemed private as well as female. She writes that reading Ghosh one thinks of the fluidity of these borders and how genuinely messy the earlier worlds were (72). These messy earlier worlds find their personalised stories and histories in Ghosh's fiction. The Arabian goddess in *The*

Hungry Tide who crosses the seas to be deified in Kolkata's hinterlands, the Jewish trader in *In an Antique Land* who lives in Mangalore for about twenty years, the French botanist in *The Sea of Poppies* who chooses Kolkata over Europe's madness; all illustrate such a statement.

Hybridity is usually seen as a condition of globalisation. Sajalkumar Bhattacharya in "Amitav Ghosh: The Indian Architect of Postnational Utopia" points out that "The primary achievement of Rushdie and his colleagues has been to render the borders of the nation-state porous, and it is through these pores and fissures that their identity has spilled into a transnational world, an event facilitated by liberalization, which took over the world in the 1990s" (127). Even though there is no denying the fact that the globalised world and specifically India after the 90s are increasingly hybrid, the kind of hybridity that the reader encounters in Ghosh is not an aspect of economic globalisation post the establishment of WTO. In many of his novels this hybridity comes as a result of pre-colonial travels. *In an Antique Land* and *The Hungry Tide* stand witness to this. In *The Sea of Poppies* the hybridity is a result of imperialist activities, specifically colonisation. *The Circle of Reason* waxes eloquent on how the ancient trade routes especially silk routes connected the whole world and left a hybrid language as a witness who would recount this connection. In *The Glass Palace* we see people who are forcefully displaced by the powerful and militant colonisers; hybridity is a strategy for survival for many of the colonised.

In *The Circle of Reason* Balaram speaks of the connection between machine and man. Balaram lives in the village Lalpukur which is described as "churning like cement in a grinder" (81). Lalpukur is a very nascent village which came into being

only after the partition. People there are originally from different places and speak different languages. The dialects of some leave some others in a flux. Balaram though a resident in Lalpukur is from Dhaka and has relatives in Burma. Speaking of man and machine Balaram tells Alu how loom is the only machine that has created man. Loom doesn't recognize the division of world. He speaks about the intertextuality of textiles.

> The loom recognizes no continents and no countries. It has tied the world together with its bloody ironies from the beginning of human time… Indian cloth was found in the graves of Pharaohs. Indian soil is strewn with cloth from China. The whole of the ancient world hummed with the cloth trade. The Silk Route from China running through Central Asia and Persia to the ports of the Mediterranean and from there to the markets of Africa and Europe, bound continents together for more centuries than we can count. It spawned empires and epics, cities and romances. Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo were just journeymen following paths that had been made safe and tame over centuries by unknown, unsung traders, armed with nothing more than bundles of cloth. It was the hunger for Indian chintzes and calicos, brocades and muslins that led to the foundation of the first European settlement in India. All through those centuries cloth in its richness and variety, bound the Mediterranean to Asia, India to Africa, the Arab world to the empire, in equal bountiful trade. (59-60)

Rudrani Gangopadhyay writes how in *Sea of Poppies* cultural hybridity finds its way into the novel by means of the spoken word. Jodu, the boat man in the novel who later lands aboard the Ibis tries to master the ship's argot by listening to it. He

understands that even though the shipmen don't understand the individual words in these orders or 'hookums,' they understand the confluence of the words and act accordingly.

In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha quotes from an interview with Renee Green by Elizabeth Brown and suggests that her questions regarding the idea of identity and representation like 'who's saying what? Who's representing who? What is a community anyway? What is a black community? What is a Latino community?' open up "an interrogatory, interstitial space between the act of representation… and the presence of community itself" (37). This interstitial space between questions regarding identity and the essence and presence of the identity is where creative discussions take place. Bhabha writes again: "It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial fixity or unity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized or read anew" (37).

This hybridity of cultures is not presented as a carelessly universalising technique. It is radical and introspective. In *The Circle of Reason* there is an interesting narrative of an emerging community. Like every group of people this too is multiracial, multilingual and multiobjectived. But they are held together by Alu's philosophy of purity and dirt. They take to it more fastidiously than Alu himself. They pool their resources and become a cashless society. A very egalitarian, modern, caste-less society where the shop owners simply become the clerks in the shop is in the making. But this idealist society is very fascist too. In an episode in which the angry but silent mob douses two contractors with carbolic acid, Alu could

be seen donning the role of a silent spectator. This society ostracises Zindi because she refuses to comply with their rules. She cannot follow their obsessive faith in purity, she rejects the idea of wearing a duster on her arm and thus incurs the displeasure of the utopians. Like Old Major in *Animal Farm* Alu loses control of this cosmopolitan society which was initially based on his notion of purity, dirt and germs.

Richa in "Ecotheology and the Notion of Multiculturalism in *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*" writes that Ghosh's novels are not about societies connected together by the World Wide Web, instead they are multicultural societies of subalterns joined together with a duty of togetherness (153). Sometimes this duty may be the result of an urge to survive. As Sujala Singh points out in "Who Can Save the Subaltern? Knowledge and Power in Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*" the characters in the novel "are realists who bond not merely with surrogate familial ties but through a pragmatic realisation of mutual economic needs" (52). Singh says that in Zindi's boarding-house people of different nationalities coexist as a feasible economic unit. Singh also says that these communities are tenuous and fragile in the face of death, violence and acts of jealousy (52). But Zindi manages to salvage the remnants of her boarding-house after an instance of the state's brutality and police violence. She garners the survivors and plans an escape route together. It is worth quoting M.G.S Narayanan here. In his "Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala" he writes that "charity began at the market place" (5). The link between trade/ commerce and tolerance has never been a tenuous one. So market place and economy needn't be deemed lesser agents in a cultural unit.

What happens in Dinu's studio Glass Palace is very deeply suggestive of the nature of Ghosh's fiction. This is how it responds to power and hails the aesthetic quality of dissent. When his non-fiction ("The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi") portrays a reluctant artist joining a protest rally, his fiction portrays an ardent artist who uses his home as a platform to stage camouflaged protest. The initial Glass Palace was the epicentre of Burmese monarchy. People entered and left it only under surveillance. But when Dinu's niece Jaya enters Dinu's studio no one notices her. Dinu's studio is a place where people assemble. This also is a motley crowd. Some are regulars, some come and are gone forever, some come exactly because of what the studio offers. The studio is a platform for those who are fed up with the incendiary circumstances in Myanmar. People don't converse here in order to reach an agreement. The Glass Palace offers the visitors an opportunity to dissent. This dissent is camouflaged and is obvious only to the dissenters. For any outsider what happens inside is a purely aesthetic discussion of photography.

Some of Ghosh's concerns when presenting the readers with the worlds of his imagination are detailed here. The syncretism of his works is the sum total of these concerns and unlike Robert Dixon's views in "Travelling in the West: The Writing of Amitav Ghosh." Ghosh is not readmitting the west's humanism in his works. Western humanism is a universalising technique; but Ghosh is always mindful of cultural differences in his work. He doesn't homogenise or camouflage disparities as same-ness.

The Threat of Homogeneity

Ghosh is always mindful of the quicksand of homogeneity. In *The Glass Palace* Dolly speaks of Matthew's rubber estate: "there was something eerie about

its uniformity; about the fact that such sameness could be imposed upon a landscape of such natural exuberance" (172). Homogeneity for Ghosh is something that is imposed upon a world that is naturally heterogeneous. In *The Glass Palace* it is said that rubber trees are fighting back, they are resisting this attempt to impose sameness on a landscape that was once wilderness. Ralph Pordzik in "The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia: A Comparative Introduction to the Utopian Novel in the New English Literatures" writes about authors who opt for " alternatives, constructed on principles of cultural diversity more appropriate to the heterogeneous nature of postcolonial cultures" (168).

Bhabha writes how the third space upends our concept of a homogenising culture in *The Location of Culture:*

> The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quiet properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary past, kept alive in the national tradition of the people. (37)

In *Sea of Poppies* Ghosh talks in detail of the Poppy monoculture which was imposed by the East India Company. Left to themselves farmers would never depend on this cash crop because of the work it demanded.

> Fifteen ploughings of the land and every remaining clod to be broken by hand, with a dantoli; fences and bunds to be built; purchase of manure and constant watering; and after all that, the frenzy of the harvest, each bulb

> having to be individually nicked, drained and scraped. Such punishment was bearable when you had a patch or two of poppies- but what sane person would want to multiply these labours when there were better, more useful crops to grow, like wheat, dal, vegetables? (29)

But whole villages are coaxed into this insanity of growing poppies. Poppies drain the people of their strength, drain their purses and make them go hungry; no one can live on a diet of poppies. Ghosh suggests that this monoculture of growing poppies was behind the huge number of indentured labourers who opted to work in faraway plantations.

The threat of homogenisation is made clear in an episode in *In an Antique Land* in which the author holds a discussion with the Imam of the village in Egypt where he resides. The same occurrence is repeated in his non-fiction work "The Imam and the Indian." The titular Imam is a religious figure who used to practise traditional healing. Amitabh, as the author is addressed in the work, goes to him to learn about 'herbs and medicines' (155). This infuriates the Imam and he asks Amitabh why doesn't he find out about the traditional medicine of his own land. The Imam says that he wants to forget about all that; he is now a practitioner of modern medicine. He is the proud owner of a box of syringes, cotton and all the other paraphernalia of modern medicine. Ghosh writes:

> I knew that he would never talk to me about the remedies he had learned from his father: not merely because he was suspicious of me and my motives, but also because those medicines were even more discredited in his own eyes than they were in everyone else's; the mere mention of them was even more distasteful to him as talk of home to an exile. (156)

This is how modernity tries to do away with a parochially relevant system of practice and learning. Modern medicine with its phials, syringes and cotton discredits the alternatives which are centuries old. Colonial enterprise made the colonised people 'travellers in the west" as Ghosh writes about another encounter with the Imam. The world which accommodated differences is threatened with extinction.

Hybrid Spaces/ Cultural Interconnections

Sajalkumar Bhattacharya in "Amitav Ghosh: The Indian Architect of Postnational Utopia" writes how space and time became fluid concepts for the ever-migratory Ghosh. His childhood that was spent across Bangladesh, Srilanka, Iran and India, his studies which took him across continents to places like England, America and Iran, his vocation and avocation that drew him to the southernmost Kerala, Delhi, the US and Cairo; all these have made his concepts of time and place fluid, Bhattacharya says (129).

In *The Shadow Lines* there is an episode of Ila's mother narrating an instance in which Ila very narrowly escaped from a snake that had come to the garden of their house in Srilanka. After the narration Tridib asks the narrator what was it that he understood from the story. This question aims to tutor the narrator about the nuances of observation, and he fails to respond correctly to Tridib's question. Tridib points out that houses in Srilanka have sloping roofs, very unlike the houses in Calcutta with flat roofs. He asks the narrator "what it would be like to live under a sloping roof – no place to fly kites, nowhere to hide when one wanted to sulk, nowhere to shout across to one's friends" (29). This could be read in many ways. It could be about the inability of a flat-roof-culture to understand the difference of a

sloping-roof-culture which is antithetical to Ghosh's thread of writing; it would be about how an insignificant detail fires up the mind of an imaginative being, and it could be about the importance of hybrid places as well. For Tridib a flat roof is very essential to life and living under a sloped roof would be terrible, it is much more than the distrust of the different and unknown that is normal to human beings. Tridib perceives flat roofs as hybrid spaces, if you are in need of privacy, they offer you a nook to sulk, if you are in a playful mood, you can fly your kite on top of it, if you need to reach out to people, again there is this same roof for you. So not living under a flat roof is highly intimidating because it means that then you stand to lose one such hybrid space**.**

Stephanie Jones in her essay "A Novel Genre: Polylingualism and Magical Realism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason"* talks about the banyan tree in Lalpukur as a metaphor for the village (5). It is all encompassing, welcomes all the moving and dying generations to her shade, people talk politics under it, they conduct rallies around it, their meetings are held under it; it has stood the test of time. Even though the village came into being only after 1947, the tree is taken to be a symbol of the village. It is a case of a symbol preceding its meaning. It's a hybrid of a past that the village never had, its tumultuous present and not so bright future with such prospective leaders as Bhudeb Roy.

Shombhu in *The Circle of Reason* likes heights and likes to climb on trees. Being on trees is being on earth and being up above as Frost reminds the readers in "Birches". Sitting on the trees he sings, after a bout of drinking. He is the one who tells Maya of the danger of building houses. He warns her;" "this is what happens when man ties himself down and builds a house. It burns down" (131). He is the one

who weaves a circle in the novel, he had come to Lalpukur with ‘a woman, and a child and a bundle of clothes’ and leaves the village in the same state (152). Shombhu, this lover of the third space, is the sole person who emerges from “Satwa: Reason” section as a reasonable man. He is driven by different drives and he sees through people like Bhudeb Roy and Balaram alike.

The hybrid nature of the disease malaria is an interesting one. In *The Calcutta Chromosome* Mangala’s cult is formed on the foundation of the hybridity of the disease. Mangala knows that high malarial fevers can cure a person of syphilis even before modern science has an inkling of it. Back then Syphilis was an incurable disease, which was fatal too. Mangala induces malaria to her syphilitic followers in a very ritualistic manner. What she does is what later would become another Nobel Prize winning discovery of Pyro Therapy. She mixes science and rituals and builds a cult on the bases of this hybridity.

In his article “Caught Straddling a Border: A Novelistic Reading of Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*” Eric D. Smith talks about how Ghosh contradicts himself in the novel. He says that Ghosh even while talking about cultural similarities is actually talking about cultural differences (451). The instance of the narrator attending a wedding feast is cited. Being the only Indian in an almost homogenously Egyptian setup he is bombarded by questions about cultural differences. Beginning with inquiries of Indians’ worship of cows they ask him whether Indian men are circumcised, women are purified by clitoridectomy. The questions that the author faces in Egypt, as Gauri Viswanathan writes, are about three C’s; cows, cremation and circumcision. The barrage of questions confuses and exasperates the narrator. He is bound by the questions and cannot answer outside

their framework. He leaves the room and Nabeel the host of the wedding runs after him explaining that those people were just asking questions. At this point the narrator describes something that he underwent when he was in Dhaka as a child, a riot, which makes him fear symbols. He says that he can never tell Nabeel this story because his society and the society of Nabeel are very different in that Nabeel's is innocent and his is violent. Smith says this contradicts the general view of the text. But in a sense, it reiterates the general view of the text. What Ghosh tries to tell is that there was a past that was rooted in cultural exchanges and coexistence which is wrecked by the colonial enterprise. He makes use of the Geniza documents to say this. He makes use of the power of the written word to say this. This again is an indictment of imperialism. When these exchanges take place inside the house a wedding celebration goes on outside which is very similar to an Indian wedding with dancing, drum beats and women's ululation.

Neelam Srivastava, in "Amitav Ghosh's Ethnographic Fictions: Intertextual Links between *In An Antique Land* and His Doctoral Thesis" mentions how Ghosh's ethnography is founded on a syncretic, non-Euro-centric and non-nationalistic history that is persistently personal and opposed to being segregationist, fundamentalist or taxonomic (62). There is an instance of the staging of "The Glory of Bon Bibi" in *The Hungry Tide*. The play talks about the history of the tide country. It begins with the minarets of Arabia and describes Bon Bibi and her brother Shah Jangoli and their arrival in the 'athero bhatir desh' to make the land inhabitable. The play is staged in a very clumsy manner. The Goddess Bon Bibi is late to arrive, and when she arrives before she could do anything she has to spit the pan out, all the while the tiger is waiting ready to attack. But the reception of the

play is unaffected by any of these factors. Even the sceptic, cynic Kanai who is sent to the tide country to be 'rusticated' watches it enthralled (111).

Richa in "Ecotheology and the Notion of Multiculturalism in *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies* " writes:

> The subaltern community on the Ibis can be taken as a microcosmic, 'developed' global world. These people are no authority, but when they are left to themselves even as slaves, they put forward an example of a non-chaotic, peaceful and apolitical multicultural society. (158)

In *The Location of Culture* using an architectural reference from Renee Green, Bhabha explains how the stairwells become the in-between/liminal space or interstitial passage that makes possible cultural hybridities that favour differences without imposing hierarchy (4). Ibis of *Sea of Poppies* is this liminal space. It is the interstitial passage that communicates cultural differences. Amongst the indentured labourers caste is no more a criterion that imposes a hierarchy. Even Zachary Reid, who is catalogued as black rises from his position of a nobody to the ship's second mate.

In *Sea of Poppies* the migrants could be seen as the pariahs or cast-aways. They are cast off by the Empire. Some like Neel Rattan Halder are thrown out using cunning ruses and some like Deeti go away because of the Empire's greed for poppies and opium. But this journey or escapade is not a debilitating one for the migrants on board the Ibis. They assume new identities, they cook up their own histories, they find a purpose and for some like Baboo Nob Kissin it's a journey towards salvation.

Devyani Agarwal in the essay “Un-Essentialising Marginality in *Sea of Poppies*” writes that the ship in the novel is a personification of universal cultural space. Paulette says when she is on board the ship that there exists a brotherhood among them. This is a relationship that is created by travelling together. The crossing of the dark waters results in the building up of a group that is bound together by water. Water becomes as thick as blood in Ibis. These bonds are strong enough to create a mutiny in the ship.

In Finding Oneself On Board the "Ibis" in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*” Rudrani Gangopadhyay says that the presence of Zachary on Ibis reminds the readers of another journey that was across the Atlantic, undertaken by the slave ships. The black Atlantic which obviously resonates with the kaala pani of the Indian Ocean has stood witness to another set of migration and diaspora.

Rudrani Gangopadhyay writes that the ship and being on it give the migrants a sense of personal agency and a feeling of belonging to a hybrid culture based on individual freedom even in the frame of indentured labour (61). Just as the Ibis is ‘mai-bap’ to the migrants it also parents the evolution of Zachary and Baboo Nob Kissin. From a carpenter Zachary raises to being the Second Mate and by and by he loses his race and proofs of his identity. Baboo Nob Kissin loses his gender and embraces his new role of a benevolent and nurturing matriarch whole heartedly.

Ghosh talks about science when he is actually talking about counter-science, Ghosh talks about riots when he is actually talking about people’s resistance to it. Ghosh talks about silence when he is talking about all those archives that stymy the overarching silences in the projected histories. He speaks about borders when he

speaks about the families that extend across the borders. This itself is a syncretic technique of storytelling.

The Myth of Insular Spaces

In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha talks about the "utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity" (34). Cultures are never distinct or unique. The moment man began to travel cultures lost their insularity. They began seeping into each other and this grew with the advent of colonialism. In a way they became mutually dependent as well. It is this mutual dependence that Edward Said points out in *Orientalism* in which the conduct of Mansfield Park depends entirely on a sugar plantation in the Caribbean (66).

Ghosh believes that insularity is a crime; in *The Shadow Lines* the narrator protests when Ila draws the sketch of the house of Prices. The sketch doesn't have a verandah which is surprising for the author because a verandah is an inseparable part of a house in his mind. One knows what happens outside the house through the verandah. A house is not just an insular place where one shuts oneself up. A house is a place that connects you with the outside too. "To me the necessity of verandas was no more accountable than the need for doors and walls" (78), the narrator says. These verandahs, like Tridib's flat roofs constitute the hybrid Third Space which is private and public at once. It is part of the house and part of the world outside simultaneously. So for the narrator not having one in front of house calls for a protest. Places have no right to be insular as far the narrator is concerned. *The Shadow Lines* is the only novel of Ghosh that has a first person narrative. The narrator seems so close to the story teller that sometimes boundaries seem to

dwindle between them. His fear of insular spaces could be the author's understanding of the myth of insular spaces.

In *In an Antique Land* Ghosh narrates the story of Sidi Abu-Kanaka's maqam. Abu- Kanaka was a person who was greatly respected. After his death he was buried in the common cemetery which came under threat since the government decided to build a canal through it. The villagers spoke to the authorities regarding this, but to no avail. The work began and when the workmen tried to plough up the graveyard, they came across a tomb that wouldn't yield to their tools. However they tried they couldn't make it move. When they discussed this with the village shaikhs they told them only Sidi's descendents could make the grave yield. So one of his grandsons was called and the tomb opened with a slight touch of his hand. This was deemed a miracle (110). Back in India, working on his research Ghosh comes across a similar story in Mangalore. Here it is a Bhuta temple which stood up against the Empire. When the government started the work of a road, people realised it would go straight through this temple. They appealed to the authorities in vain. But once the engineers began demolishing the area they were in for a surprise. The bulldozers were frozen when they tried to tear down the walls of the temple. Exactly like in Nashawy, the builders dropped their plans and made changes to them (218). These remote areas, the distance between which stupefies Khamees in the novel, tell similar tales. Even stories are not insular. All the while people go on believing these myths of insularity. The driver who stopped by the Bhuta shrine asks the narrator whether he has heard a story like that of the Bhuta's miracle. When he replies in the affirmative he nods disbelieving. Similarly in *The Shadow Lines* Ghosh speaks about people's incredulity towards syncretic civilizations. He is talking about the incident

of the sacred relic believed to be of Prophet Mohammed disappearing from the Hazratbal mosque.

> Over the next few days life in the valley seemed to close in upon itself in a spontaneous show of collective grief. There were innumerable black flag demonstrations, every shop and building flew a black flag, and every person on the streets wore a black armband. But in the whole of the valley there was not one single recorded incident of animosity between Kashmiri Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. There is a note of surprise- so thin is our belief in the power of syncretic civilizations- in the newspaper reports which tell us that the theft of the relic had brought together the people of Kashmir as never before. (225)

Ghosh's visit to the tomb of Saint Abu Hasira perplexes the authorities. Syncretism is unpalatable in the paranoiac modern world. They don't merely wonder why a person who doesn't follow any of the Abrahamic texts should be interested in a tomb that spans over Judaism and Islam, they grow gravely suspicious. People's incredulity towards syncretism is based on their belief in the myth of the insularity of their culture. Like the driver in *In an Antique Land* they would go on believing in them even when they are told that the world out there is otherwise.

Critique of Colonialism

Barbara Romanik in "Transforming the Colonial City: Science and the Practice of Dwelling in *The Calcutta Chromosome*" says that *The Calcutta Chromosome* does away with the elitist idea of science which makes it a colonial force. The novel offers instead "a narrative of the "interconnections", "interdependency", and "hybrids" of Indian life which subvert that power" (2). She

writes how the novel confutes the notion of the colonial power of science and offers a chronicle of the hybrid, interdependent and interconnected Indian life (2-4).

Instead of portraying slums, poverty and the abject Indian life like some other Indian English writers do, Ghosh resorts to a critique of the avaricious nature of colonisation. In an interview with BBC News he tells how a cash crop like opium funded the British colonial ventures in the East. "Twenty years after the trade stopped the Raj more or less packed its bags and left" he says. He stresses the shameful nature of opium trade. He says that "Before the British came India was one of the greatest economies. For 200 years India dwindled and dwindled into almost nothing. Fifty years after they left we have finally begun to reclaim our place in the world". In his review of *Sea of Poppies* published in *Indian Literature* Purabi Panwar talks about how the hill tribes of Nagaland were brought to degeneration when the British introduced opium to them (206).

Priyamvada Gopal in her book *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History and Narration* writes that "it can be argued that partitioning lands and cultures into monolithic 'nations' was an idea and practice which emerged specifically out of the strategies and then the debris of European colonialism" (87). John Su in *Imagination and Contemporary Novel* talks about how the whole enterprise of colonialism affected Britain: "In the case of hybridity, perhaps its most crucial moment of transformation occurred not in a colonial setting but in the former imperial centre, as Britons struggled in the 1970s– 80s to redefine what would constitute a post imperial Britain"(83).

In *The Shadow Lines* when May sees the Victoria memorial what she sees is very different from what Tridib or the narrator see. She says that it ought not be

there. She calls its presence an act of violence. She feels that it is obscene (170). Part of her reaction may be from being a very egalitarian person with a strong sense of justice. Some of it must be coming from her share in the burden of the common guilt that her nation bears for undertaking such hideous an enterprise as colonisation. In *The Glass Palace* Uma asks Dolly whether living with Supayalat, former queen of Burma known for her heartlessness, frightens her. Uma is the district collector's wife and there is a photo of Queen Victoria hanging on the walls of the house. Dolly responds to this question that living with the queen is not more frightening than living with the photo of Queen Victoria (114).

Uma, in *The Glass Palace*, when she is going through a Bengali newspaper comes across a picture of sixteen severed heads of Burmese rebels put on display on a table. Saya San's rebellion is crushed by the British troops and these are their trophies on display. The picture reminds Uma of medieval acts of cruelty. She cuts the picture and juxtaposes it with the air ticket in which she travelled; "it seemed impossible to believe that the shrunken world that had built this air-craft was a better one than those who preceded it" (253). The civilizing mission that the empire undertook should be read alongside this.

In *Sea of Poppies* Neel asks Burnham unbelievingly whether a war would be fought for trading a sinful thing as opium. In *The Glass Palace* Rajkumar finds it difficult to stomach that a nation would go to war for such an entity as teak. These are the wars that the empire has choreographed purely to quench its thirst for more money and more resources; purely out of greed. The ruin the poppy cultivation brought on the farmers of India, the devastation they brought about in Burma, the way opium would wreak havoc on the people of China, nothing impedes the nation

which would find its finest hour in the course of a war, as Churchill very famously declared in a speech to the House of Commons.

In *The Glass Palace* Queen Supayalat, when the royals are sent to live in Outram House, Ratnagiri, people their precincts with her servants until the whole place begins to look like a slum. She prefers to live in squalor in order to spite her gaolers, the British. When she is spoken to regarding this she would say:

> Yes, we who ruled the richest land in Asia are reduced to this. This is what they have done to us, this is what they will do to all of Burma…. We were the first to be imprisoned in the name of their progress; millions more will follow. This is what awaits us all: this is how we will all end-as prisoners, in shantytowns born out of the plague. A hundred years hence you will read the indictment of Europe's greed in the difference between the kingdom of Siam and the state of our own enslaved realm. (88)

In *In an Antique Land* Ghosh talks about how a pre-colonial 'culture of accommodation and compromise' was triumphed over by the avaricious nature of colonialism. "Soon, the remains of the civilization that had brought Ben Yiju to Mangalore were devoured by that unquenchable, demonic thirst that has raged ever since…" (237). This insatiable and devilish greed is what characterises the Empire in Ghosh's writing.

Miscegenations

Hybridity is a concept with roots in Biology. Crossing two different species enables the creation of a third species that is hybrid. Amitav Ghosh in his novels recounts many miscegenational relationships. They are not simply Anglo-Indian

relationships; Ghosh's travels, since they are mainly in the East, are replete with instances of cross-cultural relationships of Easterners.

In his review of John Updike's *Terrorist: A Novel* in *The Washington Post* on June 4, 2006 Amitav Ghosh talks about how a sense of miscegenation makes the central character of the novel Ahmad feel out of place always. But in his novels, such cultural and racial hybrids are not stereotypically portrayed. Ah Fatt in *Sea of Poppies* is born out of an Indo-Chinese relationship. Though addicted to opium Ah Fatt is presented as a sharply intelligent person who is very deft with his limbs. Even in the darkness of the cubicle in which he is incarcerated he kills mosquitoes and rats silently and alertly listening to their movements.

Another case of miscegenation is the Egyptian trader Ben Yiju's marriage to the Keralite Ashu in *In an Antique Land*. This is a pre-colonial alliance which lasts for more than a decade. Again, Ben Yiju's daughter with Ashu, who should be a Nair girl by Kerala's matrilineal standards marries her Sicilian cousin. *The Glass Palace* has a series of miscegenations. The Burmese princesses marrying Bengali laymen, Chinese Matthew marrying Elsa, who is an American, Indo- Burmese Dinu having a relationship with the Anglo- Chinese Alison, Rajkumar marrying the Burmese Dolly are all examples.

Miscegenation frightens the colonial authorities. In *The Glass Palace* when the Burmese royals are ousted from their nation and made to live in the squalor of a house in Ratnagiri the British don't trouble to better their circumstances. Many district collectors of Ratnagiri had appealed to the authorities in vain to look into this matter. But when one Burmese princess begets a child with a servant of the house, it alarms them. It makes them aware of what exactly they had done to the

family. The Collector says; "the smell of miscegenation has alarmed them as nothing else could have. They are tolerant in many things, but not this" (173).

Tridib's relationship with May in *The Shadow Lines* also is a cross-cultural one. In the novel, Tridib tells the narrator the story of Tristan and Isolde. When the narrator asks in which country did the tale happen Tridib tells him:

> That's the trick, you see. It happened everywhere, wherever you wish it. It is an old story, the best story in Europe… it was a German story in what we call Germany, Nordic in the North, French in France, Welsh in Wales, Cornish in Cornwall: it was a story of a hero called Tristan, a very sad story, about a man without a country, who fell in love with a woman-across-the-seas…. (186)

Such stories of love across the oceans or stories of miscegenations are universal. As Tridib says they could happen anywhere. Tridib's own letter of wanting to meet May as strangers-across-the-seas is reminiscent of the story of Tristan and Isolde. Another incidence is when Ila marries Nick Price. Nick Price earlier used to shy away from being seen as Ila's friend; but he ends up marrying her. In the article "The Aquatic Ideal: The House as Archive in Amitav Ghosh's Writing" Dirk Weimann tells how the Tristan and Iseult story is the guiding matrix for *The Shadow Lines*' concept of love.

> I try to delineate how the Tristan and Iseult story functions as a guiding matrix for the evolution of the novel's idealised concepts of love and freedom; at this stage of the discussion, it is only the boundary-transgressive impetus of the story which I am interested in: not only as a travelling narrative that belongs to all regions (of Europe) but also as a narrative that

thematises and celebrates love as a transgression of political and communal affiliations. (251)

Hybridity of Religions

Priyamvada Gopal states in her work *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History, and Narration* that " Ghosh reminds us that religions have not always been quite so hermetically sealed from each other, that people across religious demarcations often shared 'some of the beliefs and practices that have always formed the hidden and subversive counter image of orthodox religions'"(88).

In *In an Antique Land* the documents in Geniza show that Jews in ancient Cairo used Arabic language and even Arabic invocations of the God. They called their God Allah, which they simply used as a synonym for god and even used phrases like 'masha allah' and 'inshah allah'. This hybridity is consciously hidden away or erased by the history makers. Saint Abu Hasira who is a Muslim saint has Jewish worshippers because he was originally a Jew who decided to embrace Islam. Ghosh talks about how Judaism was affected by Sufism. There were famous Jews who penned Sufi texts on their own. Ghosh then connects Sufism and vachanakara poets of South India; "for the Sufis as for the vachanakaras, the notion of being held by bonds was one of the central metaphors of religious life" (215).

Ben Yiju is a Jew who seeks asylum in India for reasons that are not evidently stated in any of the documents that Ghosh referred. He is a practising Jew who marries a Hindu woman. Their religions are diametrically different from each other: one is monotheistic and the other is polytheistic. Judaism is an Abrahamic religion whereas Hinduism is 'pagan'. The cabbalist doctrine of selfirot and the Hindu myth of dasavatara should be considered here for their similarity. Selfirot

means the ten attributes in which 'The Infinite' reveals itself. Likewise the Hindu myth of 'dasavatara', which some ardent believers even link with Darwin's theory of evolution, is also about the ten emanations in which Vishnu, a prominent God in Hindu triumvirate, manifests himself.

When Ghosh revisits Egypt after a long break his former acquaintances ask him to go to the mowlid of Abu Hasira not out of spiritual reasons. They tell him that the place during mowlid becomes a commercial and business hub. He is given a list of things that would be available in these stalls during the festival. Another reason to go to the mowlid is strangely voyeuristic. He is told that there would be tourists for the festival and one should go there if one wants to see a tourist. Foreigners are a rare sight in the village. The spiritual aspect gets syncretized with many other mundane, earthy aspects. This mixing of the spiritual and the commercial is very lightly done.

Gauri Viswanathan writes in "Beyond Orientalism: Syncretism and The Politics Of Knowledge" that "Ghosh attempts to break free of the conventions that install the West as a reference point for anthropological knowledge. In particular, he challenges the convention of the questioning, omniscient, and value-neutral ethnographer who can pry information from his subjects at will" (23). She also asks:

> Does syncretism offer truly global possibilities for a merging of religious difference, or is it a code word for the incorporation and assimilation of "minority" cultures into the culture of the dominant group? Is syncretism compatible with dogmas of "Truth," or is it closer to a form of cultural relativism that in fact *dilutes* truth? How has syncretism been represented, for instance, in the historiography and literature of rival religious groups, and

> to what extent is it associated with tolerance or with intolerance? Is syncretism indeed the language in which, as Ghosh claims, people "once discussed their differences," and can it be the language in which those differences are open to discussion now? Most important, is syncretism possible as a subjectively experienced idea, or can it be nothing more than the stance of the outside observer, the privilege of the dominant or majority group making incorporative gestures in the name of a harmonious integration of all faiths? These questions are posed in the spirit of negotiating the difficult and often perilous terrain between syncretism and separatism as vastly different cultural solutions to problems of religious difference. (25)

In *In an Antique Land* Ghosh talks about the religious hybridity of Tulunad.

> Along with its innumerable Bhuta shrines, Tulunad had its fair share and more of temples dedicated to the gods of the Sanskritic pantheon, and most of the Tuluva people participated enthusiastically in the worship of both sets of deities. There was no contradiction in this…for to them Bhutas and Sanskritic deities represented aspects of divine and supernatural power that shaded gently and imperceptibly into each other. (206)

While the narrator watches a Tulu film, he listens to repeated references to the god 'Brahma' in a song. Once the camera zooms in on the deity to his surprise he finds that it is not the Brahma of the Sanskritic pantheon, instead it is the local Bhuta deity. Ghosh has made clear earlier that religion in Tulunad has always been an equal mixture of the Sanskritic tradition and the local one. The Bhuta deity, like a Dravidian God has curling moustaches. Sometimes religious hybridity is being assimilated to the majority's pantheon. When Bhuta is acknowledged by the

'canonical Himalayan gaze' it retains its features but loses its name. Again in the book there is an assimilation of Bobbariya Bhuta, the spirit of an Arab mariner who died at sea, into the Hindu pantheon. Here the Muslim God is deified and given a secondary position in the temple (224).

Bon Bibi, the goddess of the tide country in *The Hungry Tide*, is from Arabia; she has chosen to protect the people of the tide country. The way in which she is worshipped is recounted in the novel. The chanting is a mixture of Arabic, Persian and Bangla and the book of prayers opens to the right. But the recitation of Mantra has a Hindu rhythm. The book of Prayers is written by a Muslim author but the Bon Bibi shrine is built up by a Hindu. It is read in the novel: "the tide country's faith is something like one of its great mohonas, a meeting not just of many rivers, but a circular roundabout people can use to pass in many directions" (267). Tide country's faith doesn't offer the believers with an either-or situation. The many-ness of possibilities is what makes this hybrid condition highly welcoming.

Cosmopolitan Elements

James Clifford in his book *Routes* writes how Ghosh opens up complex histories of cosmopolitan experiences in his works. People in Ghosh's accounts are on the move. They have been so for centuries. These people are dwelling in travel (2). Travelling is a motif in Ghosh. From Alu of *The Circle of Reason* to Deeti of *Sea of Poppies* his characters travel. Ghosh's characters travel endlessly, some do that under compulsion and some like Dinu are voluntary travellers. Some of them are refugees. Some like Murugan of *The Calcutta Chromosome* are on a quest, some like the narrator in *The Shadow Lines* are trying to get at the root of something through their routes. Rajkumar in *The Glass Palace* travels sometimes in search of

fortunes and sometimes refuge. Uma of the same novel travels into the nationalist movement. *In an Antique Land* narrates the forgotten episodes of precolonial global travel and trade. Cultures lost their insularity as people began to travel.

In *The Circle of Reason* Abu Fahl and his group of friends could be seen merrymaking just before they are about to go on a march to the fallen Star to retrieve Alu's sewing machines. They are portrayed as drinking Goan liquor while joking about Japanese cassette recorders. All the while there is a radio playing in the background tuned to a Warda station (363-64). There are multiple instances of such cosmopolitanism in *The Circle of Reason.*

> On the one side of the road, jostling for space, were tiled Iranian chelo-kebab shops, Malayali dosa stalls, long, narrow Lebanese restaurants, fruit- juice stalls run by Egyptians from the Sa'id, Yemeni cafes with aprons of brass studded tables spread out on the pavement…. (373)

Priya Kumar in her book *Limiting Secularism: The Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and Film* writes how cosmopolitanism in cultural theory is a philosophical project for a more just and habitable world. She talks about how "*In an Antique Land* proffers medieval transnational —or rather prenational—trading cultures as a model of a more open and welcoming world" (45). She recounts how in *In an Antique Land*

> Ghosh creates an appealing picture of a porous and hospitable world marked by an ease of mobility between different cultures, religious traditions, and regions. His account of Qus, an oft-frequented resting place along the Nile used by travellers between Egypt and India, for instance, revels in the abundant diversity of the place. Emphasis is placed on Ben Yiju's

> description of this "admirably cosmopolitan town" with many Yemeni, Ethiopian, and Indian traders as "a station for the traveller, a gathering place for caravans, and a meeting-place for pilgrims" Similarly, Ghosh describes geographically distant Calicut as one of the most "cosmopolitan" places on the coast, frequented by regular visitors from "China, Sumatra, Ceylon, the Maldives, Yemen, and Fars (Iran)." (73)

Cosmopolitanism is not acknowledged uncritically by Ghosh. In many novels there is a struggle between the local knowledge and the cosmopolitan understanding. In *The Calcutta Chromosome* the indigenous knowledge is shown as being crowned towards the end of the novel. But in *The Hungry Tide* the indigenous wisdom is a belief in the silt and muddy banks of the tide country which thinks that a tiger comes to a human settlement to get killed, whereas the cosmopolitan Piya is of the opinion that tigers should be let to live. Even though the novel offers no conclusions in a sense it says that the deep ecology of the West could never be worked out in a region as diverse and plural and populated as India. Again, it's Fokir's local knowledge that gets institutionalized when Piya sets up a memorial for him. Without him Piya wouldn't have known that Irawaddy dolphins are very different from what she has read about them, they have different habits. Fokir believes that they are Bonbibi's messengers.

In "Is Cosmopolitanism Not for Women?: Migration in Qurratulain Hyder's "Sita Betrayed" and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*" Ania Spyra talks about the impossibility of a woman to be a cosmopolite. The kind of symbolic meaning that is associated with their bodies transcends the corporeality of it. This symbolic baggage ties her down (3). This is said in reference to *The Shadow Lines* where the

constantly travelling Ila fails to recognise the places as places, for her they constitute a string of departure lounges and rest rooms. The statement that a woman can't be a cosmopolitan is negated in the backdrop of a character like Paulette, who is almost like a shapeshifter in *Sea of Poppies*. She is not weighed down by any baggage in her travels. Zindi in *The Circle of Reason* is another cosmopolite originally from Alexandria, who chose to live in al-Ghazira, travels to India and transverses the Middle East to evade their pursuer, Jyoti Das.

In *In an Antique Land* there is very romantic vision of pre-colonial cosmopolitanism. The Portuguese when they reached Kozhikode are reported to have asked the Samutiri to stop the Muslim traders here from trading and oust them for they were the enemies of 'the Holy faith.' Samutiri very steadfastly decreed that Kozhikode is always open to anyone who wanted to trade here. How the nature of trading changed after the arrival of the Europeans is described here. Portuguese left the port of the city after subjecting it to bombardment for two days. They returned with a bigger fleet to demand the same after a year or so (236). Slowly the pre-colonial cosmopolitanism gave way and the practice of colonialism set in.

> By the time the trading nations of the Indian Ocean began to realize that their old understandings had been rendered defunct by the Europeans it was already too late….. As always, the determination of a small, united band of soldiers triumphed easily over the rich confusions that accompany a culture of accommodation and compromise. (237)

Mimic Men

Bhabha writes of the problem that colonized subjects pose before the colonial authority in *The Location of Culture*. "The incalculable colonized subject- half

acquiescent, half oppositional, always untrustworthy- produces an unresolvable problem of cultural difference for the very address of colonial cultural authority" (33). Anshuman Mondal in his *Amitav Ghosh* writes rephrasing Bhabha:

> The hybrid identity of the colonial mimic man 'menaces' the structure of colonial discourse because the 'performance' of the colonial mimic man does not conceal an essential identity underneath that remains 'authentic' and stable…. The colonial 'mimic men' occupy a hybrid cultural space that is indefinable in static or essentialised terms because they are neither one thing nor the other but something else besides, an excess that cannot be contained within the terms 'English' or 'Indian'. This illustrates an ambivalence within those very terms that renders them uncertain. (116)

Mondal talks about the uncertainty which comes as a result of not being able to fix someone's identity. In common parlance binaries constitute the rule. One is either one thing or the other. These mimic men shatter this mode of normalcy with the third option of being one thing and the other the same time. Mondal writes of Balaram of *The Circle of Reason* that "He is an archetypal figure of the colonial subject as envisaged by colonial ideologues, a mimic man schooled in the historic achievements of Western knowledge" (46). Mondal considers Saya John and Rajkumar of *The Glass Palace* as mimic men who fail in the art of mimicry. But King Thebaw and his Queen in the novel successfully flummox their gaolers, the English authorities, through their skilful practice of mimicry.

There are several mimic men in Ghosh's repertoire of characters. The District Collector and Arjun in *The Glass Palace*, Neel Rattan Halder and Jodu of *Sea of Poppies*, Kanai of *The Hungry Tide*, the police officer in *The Circle of*

Reason, Ila of *The Shadow Lines*, Imam Ibrahim in *In an Antique Land* and so on. Some are skilful practitioners of the art of mimicry. As pointed out in the earlier chapter, Neel in *The Sea of Poppies* when taken as a prisoner asks an English officer who refuses to acknowledge him whether he is diffident to speak in English. The officer can't stomach the idea of an Indian prisoner talking in his language. Neel provokes him until he shakes of his indifference and hits Neel. Neel feels jubiliant at this piece of information:

> The knowledge of this- that even in his present state, stripped to his skin, powerless to defend himself from the hands that were taking an inventory of his body- he still possessed the ability to affront a man whose authority over his person was absolute: the awareness made Neel giddy, exultant, eager to explore this new realm of power. (289)

The subversive power of mimicry is stressed here. Neel, who was an anglophile when he was the Raja of Rasakhali and revered the language of the coloniser for the literature written in it, uses this knowledge as a weapon. This becomes one important arm in his arsenal. The giddiness and exultation that Neel feels racing through him is the result of the subversive potential of the mimic man.

Another instance of mimicry is Baboo Nob Kissin's use of English in *The Sea of Poppies*. He insists on talking in English, but he mangles it very comically. This could be interpreted as an act of revolt. Like Caliban of *The Tempest* who uses the language he is taught to curse the teachers, Baboo Nob Kissin uses the language of his masters to spite them. He is an intelligent and clever man whose tricks and ruses make the novel move on, and he draws the strings of many people. That he should be unable to master the language seems rather unlikely, it must be that he

never tried. Bhabha says that “mimicry is at once resemblance and menace (87). Nob Kissin’s mimicry is at once comical and menacing.

Characters

The characters of Ghosh span a large spectrum. He talks about royals, bourgeoisie and the proletariat. He writes about the centre as well as the periphery. He writes about men, women and the in-betweens. In his works there are people masquerading as others. But these identities are finally claimed by them as their own. They merge into their masks. Most of his characters are round and complex with a few exceptions like Bhudeb Roy and Abu Fahl from *The Circle of Reason,* Burnham from *Sea of Poppies.*

Kanai is one of those characters who initially serve the pupose of a foil. Here Kanai is everything that Piya or specially Fokir is not. He is a character who is full of himself. He loves to chatter when Piya and Fokir prefer the companionable silence between people. He is a polyglot who knows six languages and many dialects. But Fokir and Piya are unfashionably monolingual, Fokir is an illiterate as well. Kanai loses his two-dimensional character as their boat proceeds to Garjontola. He becomes round, he becomes more human and complex. The event in Garjontola in which he witnesses a tiger has been epiphanic for Kanai. He judges himself after that and Kanai-post-Garjontola is a different man.

Many of his characters are very fluid regarding their identities. Some undergo sea changes. Some changes are brought about by the sea. Rudrani Gangopadhay writes that the characters in Ibis transform because of their in-between position in the ocean (58). Baboo Nob Kissin of *Sea of Poppies* transforms into a matronly figure during the course of the novel. He believes himself to be a

reincarnation of Ma Taramony and as a result his whole body changes. Zachary Reid sheds his identity of being a black also during the journey. Paulette, the French woman brought up as a Bengali assumes a new identity in the ship. Deeti becomes Aditi and continues to be so forever, exactly like Kalua who blends into the new identity of Mad Kolwer. Neel sheds his royalty and by the end of the novel becomes a convict on the run.

The complexity of human beings never lets us homogenise people. Piya in *The Hungry Tide* is an Indian who grew up in America with her Bengali parents but still with little functional knowledge of Bangla. She is described as an androgynous figure. When her research in the Gangetic Dolphin takes her to the rivers of West Bengal she feels out of place in the surroundings. It is with Fokir that she forms a connection sans words for Fokir is more at ease with silence. Piya feels that Fokir shares her mode of thinking and she feels at home in his presence. During an instance of burning a tiger alive in one of the islands of the tide country she finds her illusion of one-ness shatter. Fokir joins the angry crowd that tries to take revenge on the cat where as she is of the stance that man shouldn't take revenge on an animal.

Even though the narrator in *The Shadow Lines* criticises Ila for living in other people's stories, it would seem that the narrator himself is living in somebody else's story, namely Tridib's. He lives the hybrid life of himself and Tridib, he says that "Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and eyes to see them with" (23). This is very much evident in the narrator's visit to England. He seems to live in Tridib's story rather than in the present. He goes in search of the place names that he came across in Tridib's stories. More than that he expects to find them in the same condition in which they featured in Tridib's stories.

The adaptability of the migrant is visible in Dr Uma of *The Circle of Reason.* She is a microbiologist who hates microbiology. She breaks free of her obsession with *The Life of Pasteur*. When in El Oued she uses carbolic acid in place of Gangajal on the functional basis of its capacity to purify. She holds up her land's tradition attempting to stage *Chitrangada* by Tagore. She says that instead of worrying about rules, people should worry about being human. She is a woman of science who is accused by Dr. Mishra of not being rational.

The Calcutta Chromosome with its theory of interpersonal transference offers the readers with characters who are neither mortal nor immortal. With the chromosomal transference of information Mangala lives on in the bodies of Mrs. Aratounian, Sonali and Tara thus imbuing them all with something of a sense of immortality. Their bodies are mortal, but the information stored in the chromosomes is immortal, as the novel's definition of immortality goes. Such characters of hybrid nature are abundant in the repertoire of Ghosh.

Mirrors

Foucault in his essay "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" speaks about the medieval concept of space that is defined in binaries: like the 'sacred and profane' 'the open and closed'. Galileo upturned this notion with his concept of infinite and open space. The "place" of the middle ages dissolved and became a point that is moving. Foucault defines heterotopias in this essay as places which are thoroughly unlike utopias, the nowhere places. Heterotopias are real sites in which utopias are effectively enacted (3). Between utopias and heterotopias Foucault places mirrors, which are both real and unreal (4). In a sense it is the third space

between binaries. In Ghosh we see the constant presence of mirrors and looking glasses.

Dirk Weiman in *Genres of Modernity: Contemporary Indian Novels in English* writes how Tridib is the scapegoat for the author because he wants him to do something that he himself is unable to do: he compensates the author's inability to join crowds. Tridib doesn't simply join a crowd, he runs into one, to get himself killed. Weiman projects the whole act as a process of leaping through a mirror (257).

Pramod K. Nayar in his "The Postcolonial Uncanny: The Politics of Dispossession in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*" talks about Ghosh's "numerous references" to mirrors in *The Hungry Tide*. In *The Shadow Lines* as well the reader finds references to mirrors. Meenakshi Mukherjee in her article "Maps and Mirrors: Co-ordinates of Meaning in *The Shadow Lines* writes that the recurrence of mirrors in the novel "alerts us to the shifting reaches of meaning in the novel where simultaneity of precision and illusion transforms our perception of both space and time" (255).

After Ila's recounting of how a brave Nick saved her doll Magda from racists in *The Shadow Lines* Nick becomes a constant presence beside the narrator's looking glass. Ghosh writes:

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

Sometimes mirrors offer refuge. In *The Shadow Lines* Tha'mma reminiscing about their house in Dhaka tells the narrator how she and her sister assumed that everything in their Jethamoshai's house was upside down, like reflected in a river. They grew older and with them these beliefs of the upside down house also grew stronger. They used to laugh imagining what would be happening in that house right then. Tha'mma says: "But sometimes, you know, when our parents were angry with us or we were feeling bad about something, we used to sit out there and gaze at that house. It seemed a better place to us then and we wished we could escape into it too" (126).

R. Radhakrishnan in his essay "Globalization, Desire, and the Politics of Representation" asks of the novel *The Shadow Lines*:

> One of the chief preoccupations in that novel is how to realize a critical and mutually transformative relationship between "mirrors" and "windows." Under what conditions do mirrors that reflect the self back to itself become windows that open out to the others outside, and when do windows that provide a vision "outside" for the self become surfaces of self-recognition? And indeed, if such a transformation is possible, what would be the nature of globality that would underlie such a possibility? (328)

He asks whether in such a globality would an Indian village look in the mirror to see the metropolitan Paris reflected back (328)? But more than reflecting a reality back, as Meenakshi Mukherjee pointed out mirrors offer those places of simultaneous precision and illusion which disrupt our spatial and temporal perception. They in the novel are Foucault's heterotopia, the third space.

Defying of Binaries and Importance of the Number Three

In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha writes how 'engagements with cultural differences' disrupts our habit of thinking in binaries (2). He cites Renee Green's work *Sites of Genealogy* and tells how that specific work displaces the binary logic that creates 'identities of difference' (3). Ghosh's repertoire engages with cultural differences and thus messes with the readers' usual habit of thinking in binaries.

Ghosh tries to subvert the binary of private and public. His novels are attempts to deal with very public events through private narratives. He is interested in families and the story of nation is told through the stories of families that span continents. *The Shadow Lines* talks of partition and riots, *The Glass Palace* of historical events like World Wars, INA's seizure of Burma, the Burmese king's exile etc. through the stories of families which directly or indirectly get involved in all this. The *Ibis Trilogy* is placed around the years of opium wars, *The Calcutta Chromosome* gives the picture of the counter science that prompted a Nobel Prize winning discovery.

In *The Shadow Lines*, flat roofs are presented as defying the binary of public and private again. A flat roof is simultaneously private and public. Everything in human life couldn't be simplified to binaries. There is another option, a third choice. When cultures come into contact, they don't homogenise each other according to their position in the power hierarchy. They become hybrid. This hybrid culture constitutes the third space, Bhabha's 'third space of enunciation' (37). This third space critiques the binary classifications. In an interview with Rutherford, Bhabha talks of this 'third space': "But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able

to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge (211).

In the essay "A Novel Genre: Polylingualism and Magical Realism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*" Stephanie Jones says that in *The Circle of Reason* Ghosh disrupts the distinctions between modernity and tradition, East and West. Uma in the novel prefers the syncretism of going beyond East/West, Pagan/Civilized divide by using carbolic acid instead of Gangajal. In the tide country it is difficult to tell between widows and women with husbands. Wives in these islands dress as widows to ward off the misfortune of losing their husbands. So categorising women is not easy in the tide country.

There is an interesting toppling of the binary of the centre and margin in *The Calcutta Chromosome.* In the novel the sweeper woman Mangala is the one who orchestrates Ronald Ross' Nobel Prize winning discovery. It should be noted that the Mangala –cult who practise even in the present-day New York still form the periphery of the society. Theirs is not an upwardly mobile sect. Tara, the reincarnation of Mangala still strives to make ends meet and Lucky, her assistant who is the transmigrated Laakhan is wallowing in abject circumstances. They have the invaluable gift of immortality but they choose to live in the periphery because for them the periphery is the centre, or the whole notion of this binary is pointless.

The Circle of Reason challenges the binary of strong/weak through the character Nury. Nury in *The Circle of Reason* is an impotent man. This is a story that Nury himself spreads because his impotency helps his trade. The belief that he is impotent lets him access the courtyards that are otherwise closed to men. Again

the illiteracy of Fokir is his strength in *The Hungry Tide*. What in common parlance is deemed weak turns out to be strength in the novels.

Balaram sets up his school with two departments: 'Department of Pure Reason' and 'Department of Practical Reason', one abstract and the other one concrete, one with zero economic benefits and the other that makes big profits. But later when the whole event turns out to be hugely successful, Balaram announces his third department, 'Department of the March of Reason.' The first task that this department undertakes is that of disinfecting the whole village.

Another binary that is transcended is that of man/woman. When the novel *Sea of Poppies* begins, Baboo Nob Kissin is a man and a comprador of the colonial authorities. He is an advisor of Mr. Burnham and it's he who effects Neel's downfall. But as the novel gets unrolled his transformation to the reincarnation of Ma Taramony is seen. He becomes a matronly figure who is protective about the people in Ibis. He bestows motherly care on Neel who is a convict to be transported to the penal colony of Mauritius now. Dressed in womanly clothes, he lets Neel, Jodu, Kalua and Serang Ali, all of whom are caught in difficult situations with some even under the threat of death, leave the ship.

Though this may seem very flimsy an assessment that should be given a work of fiction, as Anshuman Mondal points out in his *Amitav Ghosh* there is in Ghosh a preference for the number three: beginning with the three sections of *The Circle of Reason* it ends with the Ibis trilogy. Mondal writes:

> Ghosh, however, suggests that Western knowledge is itself the product of those encounters – that beneath the binary rhetoric of universalism is a history of hybridity. The 'third' term silently haunts the gaps and fissures in

> the metaphysic of modernity and it emerges when knowledge is made to own up and confront its limits. Ghosh signals this third term by invoking numerous 'trinities'… (83).

The three sections of *The Circle of Reason* which are titled Satwa, Rajas and Tamas offer an Eastern view of life that passes through similar phases. The Circle again is a very Eastern concept of time opposed to the Western view of time which is symbolised by river. But reason is a stereotypically Western thing, with the irrational orient as its other. So a combination of an Eastern circle with a Western Reason in the title of the work announces Ghosh's locus of concern.

The belief in this Arabian goddess Bon Bibi in *The Hungry Tide* is not of an insubstantial or opportunistic kind. It is written in *The Hungry Tide* that the narrative of the Bon Bibi is a metaphor for the tide country itself. Kusum prays fervently to Bon Bibi as her father is attacked by a tiger. The whole village is witness to this murder. But even after this gruesome incident Kusum keeps her faith intact. Later we see her going to the Bon Bibi shrine with Nirmal and Horen. It's an irony that this shrine was set up by her father.

Ghosh's novels go on unsettling several such established binaries. Even common verbs like 'coming' and 'going' get multiple meanings once he unsettles the binary of home and abroad. *The Shadow Lines* speaks about people who can never come home. The disparity between Tha'mma's place of birth and her nationality keeps on troubling her. But for Ghosh being neither home nor abroad is a strangely exhilarating thing. The narrator of *The Shadow Lines* spins many jokes around this impossibility of 'coming home' and 'going away'. Not to be bound by the necessity of choosing between two, and to be aware of the availability of a third

set of options is treated as a liberating enterprise that Ghosh undertakes very responsibly.

Clifford Geertz in his "A Passage to India" in *New Republic* celebrated *In an Antique Land* for its portrayal of a

> mobile, polyglot and virtually borderless region, which no one owned and no one dominated. Arabs, Jews, Iberians, Greeks, Indians, various sorts of Italians and Africans pursued trade and learning, private lives and public fortunes, bumping up against one and another . . . but more or less getting along, or getting by, within broad and general rules for communication, propriety and the conduct of business. It was, we might say, a sort of multicultural bazaar. Today this part of the globe is divided, like the rest of the globe, into singular and separated national States. (54)

Gaurav Desai in his article in *Representations* suggests "how a practice that may seem syncretic- in so far as it engages the interests of more than one religious community- may in fact be experienced by the two communities in entirely different and possibly non-religious ways" (130).

Ghosh's premonition at the end of *In an Antique Land* proves right. At the end of the novel Ghosh says how the communities that were peacefully hybrid are becoming more and more insular with the passing years. Ghosh's experience in the tomb of Sidi Abu Hasira was just a prequel to what was to follow. Gaurav Desai in "Old World Orders: Amitav Ghosh and the Writing of Nostalgia" quotes a newspaper report from December 2000.

> CAIRO. An Egyptian village has cancelled the festival of a Jewish saint attended annually by many Israelis, after protests by local people

> sympathetic to the Palestinian uprising. The Council of Demito village in the Delta province of Behira said it made the last-minute decision on Sunday after an outcry in the community. There have been calls to cancel the Moulid of Abu Hasira festival permanently. Local member of parliament Emad al-Sayyed had submitted a request to the People's Assembly to have the festival called off because of public anger over Israeli ''aggression'' against Palestinians. Israeli-Palestinian violence in the last three months has killed at least 343 people, most of them Palestinian. The MP added that alcohol, dancing and singing at the festival offended the conservative mores of the mostly Muslim area. The Moulid of Abu Hasira, which had been due to begin on Tuesday, lasts eight days and celebrates the birth of a Moroccan Jew who lived and died in the village. There is no Jewish community in the area, and the festival has been organized by overseas Jewish groups with official Egyptian permission since Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979. Jews from all over the world, particularly Israel, flock to the small village to visit his shrine. (131)

Later in 2014 Zeinab El-Gundy of Ahram Online portal reports:

> An Alexandria administrative court on Monday banned the controversial annual religious festival moulid of Jewish saint "Abu Hasira" in the Beheira governorate. The court also ordered the removal of the shrine for the revered Jewish rabbi from the Egyptian antiquities and monuments list.
>
> The administrative court also ordered the government to publish this in the state's official journal and to inform UNESCO of the decision.

Gauri Viswanathan in “Beyond Orientalism: Syncretism and the Politics of Knowledge” criticises the notion of an unqualified syncretism. She warns that if historicized wrongly syncretism will be a “code word for the incorporation and assimilation of ‘minority’ cultures into the culture of the dominant group” (31). She also says that what appears syncretic to the observer may not appear so for the practitioners when differently empowered sects try to negotiate their differences. Priya Kumar in *Limiting Secularism: The Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and Film* talks about how *In an Antique Land* features the hospitable world of the medieval period with equal attention given to the religious, cultural differences that existed in the world of the Indian Ocean.

> What emerges, then, is not so much “an undivided community” (as Viswanathan suggests) characterized by the dissolution of differences in a condition of happy hybridity … but a more complex picture of interconnection and affiliation between different cultures and religions that are brought together through history or geography. (77)

In “Amitav Ghosh and the Aesthetic Turn in Postcolonial Studies” John J. Su talks about this aspect in his writings. From the first novel itself Ghosh has introduced the readers to his concepts of a more egalitarian society. From Alu’s cash-less society in the fictional al-Ghazira to the caste-less girmitiya group aboard the Ibis there were many pictures of utopian societies. Some of them fail: like Alu’s; some thrive like the bonhomie between the indentured labourers off their utopia of Ibis. Ghosh could be slightly utopian in his reconstructions of the past as well, like when he tells of the amicable Indian ocean before the spread of colonialism, and the comparative freedom of the slaves in the East.

Gaurav Desai in "Old World Orders: Amitav Ghosh and the Writing of Nostalgia" writes how Ghosh's claim that everything was alright with the Indian Ocean trade before the arrival of the British couldn't be easily established. In the article he writes that if nobody gained dominance over the Indian Ocean trade before the Europeans' entry it was not because they did not try. It was only that they were not successful (136). Desai also says that even though there is a difference between the Eastern and Western notions of slavery, to say that all was well with the Eastern kind also is something that could be disproved. Desai cites an excerpt from Gotein, who is one of Ghosh's main sources. The excerpt is about two Indian slaves, of whom one speaks for the human rights of the other and ends up in jail. This story is conspicuously not seen in Ghosh's novel. Desai says that the claims that Ghosh makes of the golden past, like the peaceful trade of accommodation during the earlier times and the comparative freedom of slaves in the East are not absolute truths. That the Indian Ocean was not monopolised by anyone before the Europeans is true, but it is true because no one had the means to rule over the Indian Ocean. The slave Bomma was comparatively free, but that doesn't necessitate that slavery could be that easily romanticised like Ghosh does when he talks about the spiritual slavery that devotees have towards their deities. There is a suggestion of this in the work when it talks about the names of slaves. Ghosh himself does make this clear in the book. Regarding the inter-racial marriage between Ben Yiju and Ashu he writes that he is all set to call the feeling between them 'love,' but he doesn't do that because the documents offer no proof of it. This is a mixture of romanticism and pragmatism. Again towards the end of the narrative of the life of Ben Yiju, Ghosh says that there are many possibilities for that story to have ended. The most romantic

one would be in which Ben Yiju returns to Mangalore and lives the rest of his life with his manumitted slave/wife Ashu. But the most probable of the possibilities according to him is that shortly after his daughter's wedding he died in Egypt and was buried somewhere there. This again is a place where Ghosh skilfully mixes the utopian and the mundane. Fiction offers such multiple possibilities and as Frederick Luis Aldama says in "History as Handmaiden to Fiction in Amitav Ghosh" writers do not offer a chance to escape into never-never-lands: "It simply means that a writer like Ghosh carefully organizes his narrative elements so as to simultaneously engage the reader's creativity and disengage him or her from confusing invented worlds with the world that exists outside the narrative fiction universe" (67). The narratives are complexly crafted and imagined and should not be considered "real," Aldama says (67).

Gauri Viswanathan writes in her essay "Beyond Orientalism: Syncretism and the Politics of Knowledge:"

> Ghosh's turn to a culturally and religiously hybrid medieval past locates the failure of a non-coercive, non-manipulative anthropology in the fact of modernity itself. But at the same time its engagement with the romance of syncretism, as a solution to sectarianism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, and religious intolerance, evokes a nostalgia that is itself unsettling. (32)

In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha talks about the postcolonial "contra-modernity" that deploys its cultural diversity which arises from its borderline condition to 'translate' the social imaginary of both modernity and the metropolis (6). In *The Calcutta Chromosome* we see Mangala's cult of counter-science

translating modern medicine to transverse to their end of attaining immortality. Bhabha writes again:

> The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent in-between space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living. (7)

When Ghosh writes about the syncretism of the past he is not merely engaging with nostalgia. It would seem that he does so because it is the most necessary thing, a thing when repeated perhaps would help all retain their sanity. Ustaz Sabry in *In an Antique Land* talks about the 'traditions of friendship between India and Egypt:'

> Our countries were very similar, for India, like Egypt, was largely an agricultural nation, and the majority of its people lived in villages, like the Egyptian fellaheen, and ploughed their land with cattle. Our countries were poor, for they had both been ransacked by imperialists, and now they are both trying, in very similar ways, to cope with poverty and all the other problems that had been bequeathed to them by their troubled histories. (106)

This is not a nostalgic rendering of the syncretism of the past or the camaraderie of the present. This is a very matter of fact detailing of two countries which were wrecked by colonialism. The speaker doesn't wax eloquent on the loss of a better past. The question of future is taken head on.

Nadia Butt in *Transcultural Memory and Globalised Modernity in Contemporary Indo-English Novels* writes:

> The construction of space in Ghosh's novel does not simply manifest territorial struggles, which tend to preoccupy the postcolonial theorists; rather, it serves to show the interplay between local and global influences, national and transnational reconfigurations and above all the search for community and alliances that cut across boundaries of cultural and ethnic identity. (94)

She talks about the usage of terms like 'space' and 'place' and how theorists like Ashcroft and Pratt identify the use of the term 'space' as colonial. Unlike them who refer to the word 'space' as a colonial construct Butt uses it as a transcultural and geopolitical notion (94). Tridib dreams about creating spaces which do not follow the dictates of binary thinking. His concept of "ruin' exemplifies this. Nadia Butt writes how this ruin epitomises his desire to transcend the imaginary lines of distance and borders. He wants to coexist in a space of 'cultural and human contact' (98). Like Tridib's preference of flat roofs and the narrator's penchant for verandahs, this mythification of ruin also is an effort to build up a hybrid space.

Gauri Viswanathan in her essay speaks about how the idea of syncretism worked towards creating a homogeneous state in England by effacing the points of differences. She also says that Ghosh's fiction doesn't get beyond nostalgia and offer solutions to the practice of religious intolerance because his "syncretism denies the historical reality of religious difference" (32). In *In an Antique Land* Ghosh writes about the problems of religious differences. India's explosive relationship with symbols is a long one. There were and are tales of

> cities going up in flames because of a cow found dead in a temple or a pig in a mosque; of people killed for wearing a lungi or a dhoti, depending on where they find themselves; of women disembowelled for wearing veils of vermilion, of men dismembered for the state of their foreskins. (171)

So in a country where the Central Board of Film Certification mutes words like 'cow' and 'Gujarat' in documentaries, the chances of fiction solving 'religious intolerance' may be narrowed down to a zero. In an article that appeared in "New Yorker" in 1997 titled "Damme, This is the Oriental Scene for You" Rushdie frames an answer to someone who asked him what is the point of writing a long book like *Midnight's Children:*

> How, then, is one to make any simple, summarizing statement- "Fundamentally, what's your point?"- about so multiform a literature, hailing from that huge crowd of a country (close to a billion people at the last count), that vast, metamorphic, continent-size culture, which feels, both to Indians and to visitors, like a non-stop assault on the senses, the emotions, the imagination, and the spirit? Put the Indian subcontinent in the Atlantic Ocean and it would reach from Europe to America; put it together with China and you've got almost half the population of the world.

So fundamentally there is no one point to writing literature, so one can't necessarily look up to it demanding solutions. Sometimes just issuing a 'humanist call for dissolving barriers between nations, peoples, and communities on the grounds that world civilizations were syncretic long before the divisions introduced by the territorial boundaries of nation-states,' as Viswanathan accuses Ghosh of doing (30), itself seems enough. As Ghosh states in *In an Antique Land* when he

reiterates the stories of religious comity, “it is the incantation that redeems our sanity” (171).

The process of hybridisation is a process of reorganisation. The third space is a contact zone, it is where boundaries get destabilized. Bhabha focuses on the transnational as well as the translational nature of culture in *The Location of Culture* (247). Culture becomes so when it develops a strategy of survival. So this translational activity is also an act of subversion. It becomes a palimpsest where the old writings are superimposed with new, and where both coexist. Bhabha writes: “Unlike the dead hand of history that tells the beads of sequential time like a rosary, seeking to establish serial, causal connections, we are now confronted with what Walter Benjamin describes as a blasting of a monadic moment from the homogeneous course of history, ‘establishing a conception of the present as the “time of the now” ” (4).

This is what Ghosh does in his novels. A minute moment from history is elaborated to make us more sensitive to the now-ness of present. His detailing of riots in Calcutta, King Thebaw’s exile, the discovery of the malaria vector, Morichjhapi incident and likewise are all connected to the “time of the now”. It is a rebellion against forgetfulness and an incantation redeeming our sanity.

Paul Gilroy writes in “Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness” that a ship is a micro-political, micro-cultural, living system that moves. Sajalkumar Bhattacharya in “Amitav Ghosh: The Indian Architect of Postnational Utopia” writes:

> The Ibis in *Sea of Poppies* is exactly such a ship, where all cultural, economic and racial borders are rendered porous, giving birth to a new

> hybridity. In this novel, Ghosh brings together a motley crew of sailors, convicts, migrants and even lovers gathered from as varied corners of the world as one can think of – from the interiors of Bihar and Bengal and other parts of Asia, and even England and the United States – all of whose lives have been intricately linked with opium politics. (135)

In "Finding Oneself On Board the "Ibis" in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*" Rudrani Gangopadhyay talks about how the characters reinvent themselves on board the Ibis. She says that only their fluid positioning on the water lets them do that. In the cultural scenario of the nineteenth century a relationship between an upper caste woman like Deeti and a lower caste man like Kalua would only end up in self destruction, Gangopadhyay writes; "but their strange in-between position on the water allows them to self construct instead" (58). Ibis is this third space which is neither land nor water. It goes beyond these binaries and exists as land on water, land that is translated into water. For the girmitiyas with no experience of the sea this is a new experience. They are a group of people who are transgressing a line, they are breaking the taboo regarding crossing the kaalapani, black water. As Bhabha remarks of the survival strategy of cultures these people on this trans-national travel translate themselves into other things. This third space allows other positions to emerge. Here Zachary Reid loses his tag of an African American, Baboo Nob Kissin transforms into an avatar of his spiritual mother/lover taramony, Paulette becomes Putli and Kalua becomes Mad Kolwar.

These interstitial hybrid spaces are what give the postcolonial writings their breathing spaces. Be it the fluidly stable tide country of *The Hungry Tide*, or the floating piece of land of Ibis in *Sea of Poppies*, the cosmopolitan fictional al-Ghazira

of *The Circle of Reason*, mirrors of *The Glass Palace*, coming-home-going-away riddle of *The Shadow Lines* or the transmigratory Calcutta Chromosome in *The Calcutta Chromosome* which defies even the ultimate binary of life and death, Ghosh's repertoire is replete with these interstitial spaces of coexistence.

Chapter 4

Shadow Lines: Blurring of Boundaries in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh

> For me, the value of the novel, as a form, is that it is able to incorporate elements of every aspect of life—history, natural history, rhetoric, politics, beliefs, religion, family, love, sexuality. As I see it the novel is a meta-form that transcends the boundaries that circumscribe other kinds of writing, rendering meaningless the usual workaday distinctions between historian, journalist, anthropologist, and et cetera. (Ghosh, “World” 84)

Blurring of lines that distinguish things and mark them off from each other is a typical trait of the writings of Amitav Ghosh. In the opening of *The Imam and the Indian* Ghosh could be seen writing against the temptation to classify things because he thinks connections are far more important than disjunctions (7). His writings consciously work against the attempts to classify them. The borders as presented in his novels are remarkable for their porosity. This chapter attempts to deal with the traditional boundaries which blur in Ghosh’s novels.

In the article "Caught Straddling a Border": A Novelistic Reading of Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*” Eric D. Smith writes:

> Like its narrator, *In an Antique Land* is often “caught straddling a border,” or many borders simultaneously, thereby forcing us to confront those difficult questions for which there are often no simple answers or facile conclusions and, therefore, none simplistically offered. Rather, Ghosh provides a

> dynamic and self-consciously problematized space in which these voices and contestatory theoretical points of view can dialogically resonate together in immediate proximity to the unquiet subject of their labours. (471)

Anshuman Mondal in his monograph *Amitav Ghosh* writes about the subjective and objective nature of the title *The Shadow Lines*. For him the title refers to many things. It represents the shadowy nature of the so-called distinctive boundaries.

> The shadow lines of the title are accordingly both subjective and objective; experiential and political; they are those invisible borders that mark the transition from youth to maturity, the past from the present, and those intangible but deeply felt markers of identity that mark oneself off from others, one's own 'community' from others… (9).

Concerns like the flimsy nature of national frontiers and their inability to really segregate people in Ghosh's fiction are already addressed by several studies. The blending of genres with which his writings engage also is a fact that has interested many. Instead of recounting them this chapter points out some less discussed acts of spilling over the boundaries.

Collapse of Time

In an interview that is featured in *World Literature Today* Ghosh talks to Aldama about how time interests him:

> In each of my books you'll see that time as a problem is approached very differently. In *Circle of Reason* each part follows a different ordering of time. *Shadow Lines* deals with time in a completely different way…. In *In an Antique Land* the structure is really that of a double helix, where you have a

> moment in the twelfth century and a moment in the twentieth century being pulled together solely by a single narrative that has no interaction. (90)

In this interview he speaks of his intention of following Ford Madox Ford's method of collapsing time (90). Apart from the temporal organisation which determines the flow of the narrative Ghosh resorts to rupturing time in many of his works. What is being shaken is the belief in a linear time. *The Shadow Lines* begins with a description of an event that happened thirteen years before the birth of the narrator. For him, since he has a double existence of himself and Tridib, narrating an event with which he has no first experience is no big matter as he is accustomed to seeing through Tridib's eyes.

Another method of upsetting the notion of time is to depict it in the backdrop of the mangroves in *The Hungry Tide*. One thing about mangroves is that they don't carry traces of the past with them. The border that separates past from present doesn't exist, because the tide country very expertly erases past, "the speciality of mangroves is that they do not merely recolonize the land; they erase time" (54). At the same time, they are chroniclers of what has happened since time immemorial. They are described as palimpsests containing the memories of all that has been past. Nirmal says of the tide country: "I am afraid because I know that after the storm passes, the events that have preceded its coming will be forgotten. No one knows better than I how skilful the tide country is in silting over its past" (74). It is a mere silting over that deludes the common eye, deep inside the land/water keeps a tab on the rhythmic tides and the cyclical history.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome* there is an instance of crashing of the boundaries between the past, present and the future. Murugan when in Calcutta stays

in the house of Mrs. Aratounian as a lodger. After spending a night in the streets of Calcutta he returns to the house to find out that his things have all been removed from the house. The clerk tells him that everything they removed is in the list which was prepared at the time when the house was sold, which was a year ago. Murugan thinks that his laptop and suitcase won't be there in the list because a year ago he wasn't even planning this trip. He is astonished to find his articles included in the list that is part of the contract. This wiping out of boundaries between the present and the future is seen in *Sea of Poppies* as well. Kalua when he is being enrolled as a girmitiya is asked his name. He gives it as Madhu. Adding his father's name to it the gomusta enters the name as Maddow Colver. Kalua repeats the name several times. The novel tracks a moment in the distant future and says:

> Later, within the dynasty that claimed its descent from him, many stories would be invented about the surname of the founding ancestor and the reasons why 'Maddow' occurred so frequently among his descendants. While many would choose to recast their origins, inventing grand and fanciful lineages for themselves, there would always remain a few who clung steadfastly to the truth: which was that those hallowed names were the result of the stumbling tongue of a harried gomusta, and the faulty hearing of an English pilot who was a little more than half-seas over. (285)

Symbols Crossing Over

Sometimes symbols also cross certain lines in Ghosh's fiction and occupy a different territory of meaning. In the essay "By Bread Alone" in *The Location of Culture* Bhabha writes of the chapatti movement of India which preceded the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Just before the Mutiny thousands of Chapattis were distributed in

the villages of India without any pamphlets or propaganda attached to them. This is said to have terrorised the British, the unceremonious distribution of an everyday food item. Bhabha quotes Sen's history of the Mutiny which says "some saw in it much meaning: some saw none" (201). Indians thought it was done by the British and the British suspected it was the work of Indian patriots/mischief-makers. As a symbol this is a very ambivalent one which defies clear categorisation. Bhabha even places chapatti as a 'defence against the Enfield rifle' (207). Bhabha concludes the article with a reference to the Vellore Mutiny of 1806 which is said to have been caused by a change in the 'sipahi' dress code. Bhabha writes that the hybridized body of the sipahi became 'a cryptic omen' just as the distribution of chapattis. These ordinary things crossed the borders of the quotidian and became omens that signified many things; everyday things like 'bread' or 'chapatti' or 'uniform' step across the line that marks off the everyday things from the significatory, relevant and extraordinary. Curiously chapatti finds a place in *The Glass Palace* as well. Ghosh writes how this act of changing signification affected the military people. Lieutenant Hardayal Singh becomes the butt of ridicule because of his love of chapattis. Indian Officers of the army are expected to be comfortable with the English diet which includes pork and beef. But Lieutenant Hardy goes to the common soldiers' mess to eat chapattis every day. He thus crosses a taboo line and this causes many problems for him. Later his friends make fun of him citing this incident. In a sense they are ridiculing his inability to be acclimatised to the dietary habits of the English people. In another sense they try to downplay his nationalist spirit and remove a grave concern of potential breaking of ranks.

Deeti's shrine in *Sea of Poppies* again witnesses a symbolic transfer. The novel begins recounting what makes her include the ship Ibis in the pantheon of gods in her shrine. This is not a shrine in strictly religious terms, this is more like Deeti's journal, a record of her everyday life, a place where she connects her mundane life and spirituality. Things that are central to her life, incidents that matter to her find a slot in this shrine of hers and are inscribed there forever. When she joins the Ibis she recreates the shrine on the walls of the ship, this time beginning with a picture of her daughter. Deeti is a Hindu woman and when the practice of Hindu religion forbade crossing the seas or the kaalapani, Deeti defies it by crossing the seas with her shrine itself. Deeti's shrine is more than a shrine, it is as stated earlier more quotidian than religious, containing a spectrum of people as varied as Kalua and Zachary Reid; it is a summary of her life made visible.

Clothes in Ghosh's fiction are always more than clothes. From *The Circle of Reason* itself they represent a world that was connected through trade; a point that has been discussed in earlier chapters. The most intuitive and insightful Shombhu in *The Circle of Reason* wears a gamcha always. He is a weaver who wears less of what he makes. His gamcha is his philosophy of life which believes in having only as much as one really finds necessary. It's his assertion of minimalism, exactly like his idea that one is not supposed to build houses for oneself. But in *The Hungry Tide* gamcha for Piya is a token that calls for nostalgia. When she finds this piece of cloth in Fokir's boat she tries hard to remember its Bengali name, for the word like the whole language of Bangla had deserted her. When she recovers the word 'gamcha' with Fokir's help she reclaims a lot of memories along with it. Gamcha for her expatriate father, who is not a person who revels in nostalgia, is something that

stands for everything that his land is associated with. He doesn't let go of the chequered cloth which has begun to disintegrate. In the wake of this nostalgia Piya associates gamcha with an altogether different thing, for her it's a part of Fokir and her nostrils pick out the salty smell of his sweat in an almost sensual manner from this piece of cloth. Again in *The Hungry Tide* the physical barrier between Horen and Kusum melts when Horen wipes away the mud sticking on her ankles with his gamcha. This chequered piece of cloth is attributed a very sensuous importance in the novel.

Books often figure in Ghosh's novels as things that bind and shackle their possessors. *Life of Pasteur* in *The Circle of Reason* almost cripples Balaram and his nephew Alu. Balaram's idea of gifting people is providing them with copies of this book. Such a gift that he had bestowed on Dantu ends up in the hands of Alu when he is in Algeria. Dantu's daughter Dr. Uma also is bound by this book and for her Carbolic acid is as pure and functional as Gangajal. Alu and Uma free themselves by putting this book on a very ceremonious fire; a funeral pyre. *The Shadow Lines* shows how the narrator's idea of cartography was governed by *Bartholomew's Atlas* and it is only when he grows up and is confronted by bleaker realities that he understands the arbitrary nature of the borders in it. In *The Glass Palace* Arjun could be seen reading books always. Arjun is presented as a person who is there to remind the reader of the pitfalls of his existence. Arjun withers away in the novel, achieving nothing. The other person in the novel who draws sustenance from books is the district collector who kills himself. He is doubtful of the Burmese royals' ability to love for he thinks that such finer feelings are reserved for people who read books and appreciate paintings. Nirmal in *The Hungry Tide* is in the clutches of Rilke's

Duino Elegies. His pursuit of revolution, love and lyrics doesn't do him any good. Thus at many points in Ghosh's writings, books stand as manacling and chaining objects rather than as windows and doors to the outer world which is a more common association.

Peripheral Centralities

Ghosh talks to Chitra Sankaran in the interview "Diasporic Predicaments" about his preferences. Life in the margins interests him more than the mainstream ones. He talks about writings that deal with the public events.

> For some reason, I've always been drawn to exactly the opposite. That which is obscure, that which is hidden, that which is occluded, that which is marginal. I don't know why—it just interests me. I'm just not interested in writing about pop culture and Bombay. It's not that I dislike it, I think there's a lot to be written and other people are writing those books. But I'm drawn to rural India, to marginal India, I'm drawn to marginal people in India, I'm drawn to marginal people around the world, I'm drawn to Burmese, Cambodians, to obscure figures, defeated figures and people who salvage some sort of life out of wreckage . . . these characters appeal to me, they interest me. (12-13)

Nandini Bhattacharya writes in "Revisiting Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*" how Ghosh's writing puts on the centre stage something that is so very marginal in West Bengal, namely the Sundarbans.

> The entire question of centre/margins needs to be rearticulated for the uninitiated. Any Bengali worth his/her salt would know that the Sundarbans – a marshy, tiger/crocodile-infested mangrove terrain – is Kolkata's

> (Calcutta's) backwaters and in common parlance known as 'Kolkatar jhi (Kolkata's housemaid), literally because it is a poverty-stricken hinterland that provides Kolkata babus (gentry) with their supply of housemaids; and metaphorically because it is an area that has been traditionally neglected by successive governments of West Bengal. Kanai is aware of such realities, even as a mere child when he had been rusticated to the Sundarbans as punishment for defiant behaviour in school. He knows instinctively that his neighbours in the city would look upon Kusum (his childhood mate in the Sundarbans) as the new jhi or housemaid if she chanced to accompany Kanai to Kolkata. (60-61)

Peter Morey and Alex Tickell in their introduction to the book *Alternative Indias : Writing, Nation and Communalism*, write: "In other words, the great centre–periphery divide usually identified in relation to the European imperial powers and their former colonies may have to be reconfigured when analysing the internal political dynamic of postcolonial nations. Those at the centre and those on the margins of such units offer very different views of postcoloniality (xxx). Ghosh's views of postcoloniality is one from the margins as exemplified by his characters.

As James Clifford points out in "Notes on Travel and Theory", "every centre or home is someone else's periphery and diaspora" (177). It may be otherwise as well. Somebody's margin may be somebody else's centre. *The Hungry Tide* offers an example for a seemingly unimportant meeting held in Calcutta influencing the whole continent. Nirmal in *The Hungry Tide* reports having attended a conference in Calcutta which was organised by the Socialist International. He would say "that this conference was one of the pivotal events of the post-war world: within a decade or

two, Western intelligence agencies and their clients were to trace every major Asian uprising- the Vietnamese insurrection, the Malayan insurgency, the Red Flag rebellion in Burma and much else-to the policy of 'armed struggle' adopted in Calcutta in 1948" (82). Nirmal tells this to remind the listeners that no place is remote enough to be unaffected by the flood of history. A marginal occurrence in Calcutta proves a watershed moment in the history of the struggle against the iron hands of power.

Clifford's argument of one's centre becoming another one's periphery is also applicable to Kanai in *The Hungry Tide.* In the novel once Kanai and Fokir reach the island Kanai understands that Fokir has switched the tone of his address. Earlier he addressed Kanai with 'apni' suggesting respect, but now he has moved onto a 'tui'. Kanai addresses Fokir with this tui usually, he does it because he thinks he is a naïve, childish man who needs to be patronised. But the island has reversed their roles. The authority has shifted. The island is where Fokir has authority. His centrality automatically pushes Kanai to the side-lines making him feel very vulnerable. Bhattacharya writes of Kanai's experiences in "The Indian Architect of a Post national Utopia":

> But placed in a locale where all boundaries are only tentative, Kanai's experiences and meetings with the 'other' begin to work a transformation in him. This initiates in him an examination of the self, the condition that makes Ghosh's ethics possible. We see this process at work in Kanai's denigration of Fokir, a low-caste fisherman. Kanai's abuse stems from his need to assert his class inflected authority and reconstitute his social and cultural norms. When he insults Fokir, Kanai becomes conscious of how

> entrenched his class and cultural convictions are within him. It is through this experience that his cosmopolitan vision arises, replete with glaring moral truths. He not only grasps the structures of violence and oppression operating within the dominant social order, but in his epiphany Kanai sees the decentring of his identity and values, and the extent of his false bourgeois consciousness. This is replaced with an emancipatory, though humbling, consciousness. (134)

The narrator of *The Shadow Lines* talks about the fragile nature of his existence. He goes to one of his relatives' house and looks at the dump-yard behind it and at the people scavenging there. He understands that the distance from these margins to his central 'bhadralok' existence is not an untraversable one.

> I knew perfectly well that all it would take was a couple of failed examinations to put me where our relative was, in permanent proximity to that blackness: that landscape was the quicksand that seethed beneath the polished floors of our house; it was the sludge which gave our genteel decorum its fine edge of frenzy. (132)

Native informers form a formidably influencing set of characters in Amitav Ghosh. Be it Mangala in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, or Fokir in *The Hungry Tide*, they are the conventionally marginalised, illiterate people who are very integral to the story line. On the role of native informers in taxonomic sciences Ghosh elaborates in the interview "Diasporic Predicaments." He talks about the central position they enjoyed in these disciplines citing the example of *Hortus Malabaricus* which was informed deeply by a man called Itty Achuthan. He is a traditional Ayurveda physician in Kerala and many passages in the book *Hortus Malabaricus*

were taken from the manuscripts he maintained. In this interview he also mentions categorisations and classifications as predominantly Western methods. Ghosh writes:

> When this text was published in Holland in the seventeenth century, Itty Achuthan even wrote the afterword to it and said, "as far as I know the contents of this volume are alright." Since the beginning of the taxonomic sciences, specialists have always relied upon native informants for categorizing the knowledge of the world. I think there's no shame to our admitting that the systematic work of categorization has been done mainly in Europe. But it has always drawn upon the variety of the world's knowledge. (8)

Murugan talks of Ronald Ross in *The Calcutta Chromosome*: "He thinks he is doing experiments on the malaria parasite. And all the time it's he who is the experiment on the malaria parasite" (69). This is a subtle role reversal. The so-called centre is no more the centre. The passage signifies the marginality of the centre. Mangala and Laakhan are the ones who do the research and their research has progressed to a supernatural realm. Mangala and Laakhan are fringe people. They occupy the peripheries of existence. Still it is they who control the action in the novel. The novel says that the distinction between culex and anopheles mosquito is as obvious to Mangala as the distinction between a daschund and a Doberman is to Murugan (209). Knowledge happens to them, and they believe that to know something is to change it.

The Hungry Tide presents people and tigers at the margins simultaneously. Kusum during Morichjhapi incident laments over a world order which prefers

animals over men. She wonders about those people who would have people killed so that tigers live. In the Sundarbans tigers claim hundreds of human lives every year. People avenge these deaths by killing tigers back as well. Government takes actions against the people to ensure the protection of the tigers. This is an everlasting process there. Piya once witnesses a tiger killing and incapable of understanding the local feeling tries to intervene on behalf of the tiger. Fokir saves her from the angry mob. Piya tells Fokir: "Once we decide we can kill off other species, it'll be people just the kind of people you're thinking of, people who're poor and unnoticed". This is a place where the narrative leaves its ambivalence. In the novel Ghosh doesn't specify where his answer lies regarding the question of deep and shallow ecology. It's almost like men's life next—matters more than that of animals. But when Piya says this the readers are reminded of what has happened in the Morichjhapi islands. In the Morichjhapi incident people were killed, people who match the definition of Piya; 'poor and unnoticed'. In a way of reading what people do to the tiger is what the government does to the refugees. It is what it does to the killers of tigers. Certain roles are reversed here; tigers in certain narratives form the centre and in certain others are peripheral. People who are always marginal assume power during tiger-burnings. But the centrality of the state never changes, but this centrality doesn't put an end to tiger-killings either.

Amitav Ghosh's concern with the margins must have something to do with his alliance with Subaltern Studies or vice versa. That he is interested in the margins is something that he has made clear on many an occasion. His margins abound with life. When the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* is involved in a debate with his friends regarding the 1964 riots in Calcutta he finds out that none other than he has any

inkling of the event. He decides that it is his duty to make them remember. “I was determined now that I would not let my past vanish without a trace” (221). This determination not to let the past situated on the margins of approved history vanish altogether is a driving factor in Ghosh’s literary and non-literary works. Situated on the other end is the foil for the narrator, Tha’mma; the narrator describes her: “she hates nostalgia…she has spent years telling me that nostalgia is a weakness, a waste of time, that it is everyone’s duty to forget the past and look ahead and get on with building the future (208). *In an Antique Land* also is about the” barely discernible traces that ordinary people leave upon the world” (6). The traces of these marginal people form the central part of the narrative.

But these people lurking in the side-lines of the society never occupy the centre stage. As pointed out earlier, even after mastering the superhuman act of interpersonal transference the Mangala-cult in *The Calcutta Chromosome* doesn’t lay claim to power or come to the forefront of the society. They are happy with their peripheral existence. Mrs. Aratounian lives a very uneventful life and Tara also could be seen struggling to survive in the U.S. Centre doesn’t hold charm for them. Happily living their borderline, marginal existences they unsettle the dichotomy of the margin and centre. More than jumping to the conclusion that the margin is the new centre one could say that the novel wipes out the distinctions between the terms in the dichotomy.

Fact and Fiction

In an interview with Frederick Luis Aldama Ghosh responds to a question regarding the mixing of fact and fiction. “In the end it's about people's lives; it's about people's history; it's about people's destinies. When I write non- fiction, I'm

really writing about characters and people, and when I'm writing fiction, I'm doing the same thing. So that shift isn't as great as it might appear to be" (86). The demarcation lines between both don't hold value for Amitav Ghosh.

Mixing of fact and fiction is a common element in Ghosh's fiction. *The Calcutta Chromosome* exemplifies this with its portrayal of the Mangala cult. That Ronald Ross won the Nobel for finding out the vector of Malaria virus is a fact. By developing the remarks that Ross' journal carried regarding the attenders in his lab and the servants he had, Ghosh pens a whole novel. In *The Circle of Reason* when the omniscient narrator describes one of Balaram's collegemates dressed in European clothes it is written: " He shall remain unnamed, for he was later to rise to prominence in Congress politics and achieve renown for his venality. He may still be lurking in some Calcutta suburb today" (45).

There are times during which fiction glosses over the fact. It is done because talking about the fact may be extremely disastrous. Ghosh in his correspondence with Dipesh Chakravarty talks to him of the people of Burma. They live cowering under the military junta and behave like everything is normal. Dinu in *The Glass Palace* tells how they talk about photography when what they really talk about is the need for the artist's freedom. They can't voice their opinions directly, so they find out round about ways of voicing their dissent. In his letters to Dipesh Chakravarty, Ghosh talks of the impossibility of tracing cultural coercion:

> If you went to Burma today you would see that people often appear light-hearted. People smile and laugh much more openly than they do in India and you would be hard put to find anyone who would talk about political or

> economic difficulties. But if you were to take all this at face value you would be deeply mistaken about the circumstances of the Burmese people…. (90)

Ramachandra Guha in his review of *In an Antique Land* writes: "But the work defies not merely the walls that divide university departments: it is a challenge to a more sacred boundary still, that of separating 'fact' from 'fiction" (451). For Ghosh stories are there to live in. In *The Shadow Lines* Tridib states: "Everyone lives in a story…my grandmother, my father, his father, Lenin, Einstein and lots of other names I hadn't heard of; they all lived in stories, because stories are all there to live in (182). *The Circle of Reason* also exhibits a fascination with the nature of stories. In *The Glass Palace* an ageing Rajkumar could be seen narrating stories to his grandchild Jaya: "And then he would begin to talk; stories would come pouring out of him- of places that Jaya had never been to and never seen; of images and scenes that were so vivid as to brim over from the measuring cup of reality into an ocean of dreams. She lived in his stories" (483).

The stories of Theba Raja of *The Glass Palace* are still circulated in Ratnagiri even eighty years after his death. People talk about him as if he were alive. His name can be seen on bill boards, hotels and street corners. A king who is described as 'profoundly untransportable' is loved in abundance in the land to which he was exiled; "in the bazaars they spoke of him as though they had known him at first hand" (491). The novel tells how the stories had kept him alive.

Ghosh states in "The Diaspora in Indian Culture" that "the links between India and her diaspora are lived within the imagination. It is because this relationship is so much a relationship of the imagination that the specialists of the imagination – writers – play so important a part in it" (76). Imagination for some of his characters

is more real than reality. John Su talks about how imagination in Ghosh is a unique technique for recovering alternative knowledge systems:

> It figures prominently in texts that have been categorized as postmodern, such as John Fowles's *Daniel Martin* (1977); it also figures in texts that have been categorized as postcolonial, such as Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2001). Indeed, despite their different backgrounds and social locations, both Fowles and Ghosh portray multinational capitalism as the dominant social, political, and economic formation in terms of which all conditions of life must be understood. Both Fowles and Ghosh claim that the novel enables its readers to engage in a unique form of imagining that is crucial to recovering and communicating alternative systems of knowledge. Their narratives repeatedly turn to questions of what can be known or not known, what can be verified, and what is considered authentic knowledge. To the extent that they posit spaces beyond the reach of global capital, *Daniel Martin* and *The Glass Palace* have a utopian quality. Neither seeks to provide a blueprint for the future, but they both explore the extent to which imagining enables individuals to recognize the current conditions in which they live, and the nature of the exploitation they endure and often promote. (3-4)

Amitav Ghosh talks about the power of imagination in *The Shadow Lines.* The narrator of the novel is gifted with an imagination that helps him transcend the limits of time and space. He talks about how reality is just a fabrication undertaken by imagination. He is contrasted with the pragmatic Ila. When he couldn't persuade her with his notions of time and space the narrator sighs: "I could not persuade her that a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one's imagination;

that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine, neither more nor less true, only very far apart" (21). Imagination is a very factually concrete thing in *The Shadow Lines*. Often we see the narrator becoming Tridib, the tutor who initiated him into the powers of imagination. He can imagine Prices' house more concretely than Tridib might have seen it. He remembers the destroyed streets of London that Tridib had witnessed when he visited London during the First World War. He has a cartographic imagination that materialises as reality.

Speculation is an important part in *In an Antique Land*. The story of Ben Yiju, Ashu and the slave Bomma is replete with a lot of missing links. Only the outlines are visible, what exactly might have transpired within these marked outlines is open to interrogation and change. The marriage between Ashu and Ben Yiju might not have taken place; what Ghosh does as Padmini Mongia points out in "Medieval Travel in Postcolonial Times: Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*" is what every historian does when he/she lacks proofs. "Where the official document ends, its interpretation takes over", Mongia writes (81). The fictional quality of the seemingly factual history is brought to life in *In an Antique Land*. Regarding the life of the Tulu slave Bomma as well Ghosh provides the reader with some fragmentary pictures. These fragments are shored against the narrative of official historiography.

Bhaktin writes in *Dialogic Imagination* that even an autobiography is representational and so itself not real. The chronotope of the writer is in the open-ended present, whereas that of the character is enclosed within the story:

> Even had he created an autobiography or a confession of the most astonishing truthfulness, all the same he, as its creator, remains outside the world he has represented in his work. If I relate (or write about) an event that

> has just happened to me, then I as the teller (or writer) of this event am already outside the time and space in which the event occurred. It is just as impossible to forge an identity between myself, my own "I," and that "I" that is the subject of my stories as it is to lift myself up by my own hair. The represented world, however, realistic and truthful, can never be chronotopically identical with the real world it represents, where the author and creator of the literary work is found. (256)

The reality of the real inside a work of art is always contestable and so itself to search for fact in fiction is as beneficial a task as to search for fiction in fact. Just as in official historiography, in life as well one can't be sure where one thing ends and the other begins.

There are several other miscellaneous border crossings in Amitav Ghosh. In *The Glass Palace* when he stays at Alison's house at Malaya, Dinu frequents the ruins near the jungle. He finds the place oddly captivating. It nourishes his interest in photography and he discovers novel things, places, sculptures etc. every other day. Spending too much time in the wilderness makes him resent the orderliness of the rubber plantations. What is orderly and monochromatic attains the status of the contrary in the eyes of Dinu.

> When he crossed the stream, after bicycling through the estate, it was no longer as though he were tiptoeing into a place that was strange and unfamiliar, where life and order yielded to darkness and shadow. It was when he crossed back into the monochrome orderliness of the plantation that he felt himself to be passing into a territory of ruin, a defilement much more profound than temporal decay. (336)

In Ghosh as Ramachandra Guha points out in his review of *In an Antique Land* we see spirits who cross over from their realms to arrest the bulldozers of development (451). In *The Hungry Tide* Ghosh writes about how even "the most miraculous seemed always to be those that had the most quotidian origins" (132). The boundary between the mundane and the magical is a slippery one as suggested in *The Glass Palace*. In the novel when in Burma, Manju is surprised to find Buddhist monks who come to houses for collecting alms. These monks in saffron garbs walk down the busy, dusty street with patience writ large on their faces. They unsettle the notions of everyday reality by their very presence.

> There was something magical about the fact that this interruption came always at a time of day when the tasks of the household were at their most pressing; when there was scarcely room in one's head but to think about what had to be done next. And in the midst of all that- to open the door and see the monks standing there, waiting patiently with the sun beating down on their shaven heads: what better way could there be of unbalancing everyday reality. (342)

Rajkumar had once crossed the border between Burma and India in search of Dolly. Later he marries her, they have children, they settle in Burma. When the Japanese army invade Burma, the family flees to India. They reach Lankasuka in Calcutta destitute. Throughout the journey whenever Rajkumar weakens Dolly could be seen fortifying him. Dolly returns to Burma to join a Buddhist monastery. The final sentence regarding their relationship is given as "He never saw her again" (482). It's a very heavy sentence partaking nothing of the passion that had driven Rajkumar across the borders years

back. It tells us how love oversteps a border and transforms into its opposite, lovelessness.

How art lets people cross some taboo lines is shown in *Sea of Poppies*. Deeti and Kalua are on the run and they enrol themselves as girmitiyas and board the ship Ibis inorder to be transported to Mauritius or Mareech. They evolve into new identities and new names. Deeti dons the role of a childless mother and thus is prevented from letting fall any detail of her daughter Kabutri. But when she takes up a piece of charcoal and draws pictures on the wall of dabusa, the first picture that is drawn is that of her daughter. Even if she can't voice her concerns art lets her etch them down.

In "Finding Oneself On Board the "Ibis" in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*" Rudrani Gangopadhyay writes that one of the reasons that the jahazbhaiz and bahens of Ibis like the ship is that the ship lets them transgress the boundaries that kept them in when they were in land. Back in their home land they were divided by the shadow lines of caste, race, economic status etc. "since these boundaries exist on land, it is only natural that the reshaping of their identities would occur on water, where no lines can be drawn and rivers and oceans merge" (59).

Another line crossing is that of the sciences and the pseudo sciences. Balaram in *The Circle of Reason* is an ardent admirer of science. The sciences he follows and practises are 'phrenology' and 'criminology'; both according to new age labels are pseudo sciences. Usually science is seen as something that has its bases in empiricism and logic; the line that distinguishes the real from the counterfeit should be clear and well demarcated. But the sciences that Balaram practised with their theoretical books and empirical methods are now deemed as pseudo sciences.

Porous boundaries characterise the hypothetical invulnerability of science and the vulnerability of endangered ex-sciences like alchemy or astrology. Claire Chambers in "Historicizing Scientific Reason in Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*" writes that the rigidity of distinction between pseudo-science and science is in fact introduced only after the Industrial Revolution. Chambers cites the example of the colonial scientist who made use of mesmerism to promote the spectacle of science and thus ensure its acceptance by the illiterate orientals (41). And one should be mindful that this happened in the mid-nineteenth century.

Tuomas Huttunen in "Language and Ethics in *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh" tells how Kanai unlike Fokir is a hostage of language. He senses the world through language. For Fokir Garjontola is a phenomenon that raises goosebumps. He asks Kanai babu whether he feels the same way. Kanai, the prisoner of language can answer only in the negative. There is no alternative than replying in the negative because he is conditioned by the language so. But this changes when Fokir leaves him in the island and rows away. Garjontola is on the thither-side of the border that divides the islands between the humans and tigers. When in Garjontola Kanai crosses the border between sanity and insanity. Fearing a horrible death in a crocodile attack Kanai moves towards the shore only to be welcomed by a hallucinatory/real tiger. In a dream-like sequence Kanai loses his language and feels the primeval fear.

> This was where it would be, if it were here, on the island— but what was he thinking of? He could not recall the word, not even the euphemisms Fokir had used: it was as if his mind, in its panic, had emptied itself of language. The sounds and signs that had served, in combination, as the sluices between

> his mind and his senses, had collapsed: his mind was swamped by a flood of pure sensation. The words he had been searching for, the euphemisms that were the source of his panic, had been replaced by the thing itself, except that without words it could not be apprehended or understood. It was an artefact of pure intuition, so real that the thing itself could not have dreamed of existing so intensely. (329)

Kanai after the Garjantola incident is a man who has crossed a border. He is no more the suave personality that he was. *The Hungry Tide* like-wise is about many such border crossings. The setting of the novel itself presages this. Of the blurring boundaries between the land and water Ghosh writes in *The Hungry Tide*:

> The rivers' channels are spread across the land like a fine-mesh net, creating a terrain where the boundaries between land and water are always mutating, always unpredictable. Some of these channels are mighty waterways . . . others are no more than two or three kilometres long and only a few hundred meters across. Yet, each of these channels is a "river" in its own right, each possessed of its own strangely evocative name. When these channels meet, it is often in clusters of four, five or even six…. In the language of the place, such a confluence is spoken of as a mohona —a strangely seductive word, wrapped in many layers of beguilement. There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. (7)

Piya has a connection with Fokir that transcends the barriers of language and culture. Fokir and Piya don't even share a common language. Even though Piya had been very confident about managing on her own, Sundarbans proves her wrong. Sundarbans' muddy waters make her dependent on the local knowledge of Fokir

who saves her more than once from near death and once from a near-arm-amputation. The relation between them is based on mutual attraction, but it never leaves the realm of being platonic. They transgress a few lines and make their bond difficult to classify:

> …it was surprising enough that their jobs had not proved to be utterly incompatible—especially considering that one of the tasks required the input of geostationary satellites while the other depended on bits of shark bone and broken tile. 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 the other one's head—was far more than surprising: it seemed almost miraculous. (118)

Bhattacharya talks about the locales of Ghosh which are scattered around the globe and the characters who travel endlessly.

> The most interesting thing in this regard is Ghosh's use of varied locales. His novels are anchored to Indian suburbs as well as American airports, Egyptian villages to Burmese palaces, and like their globetrotting creator the characters in his novels travel untiringly from one location to another, shrinking the global world to a global village. Even in *The Hungry Tide*, where the local is restricted to a remote, rural area of the Sundarbans, one can hardly miss the universal issues and eternal note that concerns Ghosh. (136)

Similarly, in conversation with T. Vijay Kumar, Ghosh declares: "See, for me the novel is the form that synthesizes all kinds of expression …. So this is why I

write novels, because I think novels can synthesize geology, history, personal relationships, emotion, everything" (103). What Ghosh tries to achieve is a synthesis. Compartmentalising things into mutually exclusive criteria won't do good for Ghosh. As he has made clear, his dream is to create a "place where there are no borders between one and one's image in the mirror" (Ghosh, *The Shadow* 51).

Priya Kumar in *Limiting Secularism: The Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and Film* writes about how Ghosh turns to premodern spaces of hospitality to contest the rigid boundaries of modernity (56). His depiction of the parallel story in *In an Antique Land* forms part of this attempt. And again when Ghosh is stymied by the Egyptian authorities when he tries to visit the tomb of Sidi Abu Hasira he recounts the inability of 'these pre-modern spaces of hospitality' to intervene on his behalf.

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

Ismail in *The Circle of Reason* is described as a dim-witted person. But it is he who locates Alu in the rubble. He is the one who hauls in people to help Alu out of the wreckage. His intuitions are sharper than the tuitions of everyone else. A

similar case is that of Ilongo, the village idiot. That Ilongo rises out of the rags just not to be confounded by the glamour of the riches is a story that is so beautiful for its faith in poetic license. Ilongo is the bastard son of one of the shareholders of the estate. Later when he has control over the running of the estate, he entrusts it to a Board, the Board of Malaysian Plantation workers.

In the section titled "Egypt in America" in his work *Colonial Desire and Hybridity*, Robert Young writes about the West's attempt to prove that Egyptians were originally Caucasians (133). Egypt was being found to be the mother of all civilizations and was looked upon as a place from where knowledge itself began. Thus arose the need to whiten a Black Egypt. The Egyptomania of the West sent many scholars and explorers into the land to hunt out the evidences of its new stature. Many went on treasure hunts in Egypts crypts of knowledge. The emptying of Geniza that Ghosh mentions in *In an Antique Land* also is one such instance. The contents of the Geniza made the European libraries richer. The Egyptian Imam in *In an Antique Land* tells us how the West robs a country of its glory and history. Imam Ibrahim renounces his traditional methods of healing and resorts to the techniques of modern medicine. His own system of knowledge stands degraded in his own eyes; he says people need injections and keeps a box ready with him which carries a syringe and some soiled wad of cotton. The same land which charismatically beckoned the knowledge-hunters of the world houses generations of people who no more believe in the glory of their wisdom.

The Circle of Reason tells how misbegotten plans achieve the status of customs. Malik of al-Ghazira refuses to be coaxed into signing a treaty with the British in connection with the oil wells of the country. He plans to kill the British

resident when he comes to Malik's palace by dousing him in hot oil. But the Resident manages to get out alive owing to certain mistakes in timings. Nury, malik's egg-provider saves the situation by cooking up a new tradition of "Ant-Frying.' Malik alleged that the Resident's contempt towards Ghaziri things makes him unaware of the local customs. This takes the British warships off the course. The custom then is repeated every seven years.

In *In an Antique Land* Ghosh talks about the fluidity of borders between religion and superstition. His attempts to visit the tomb of Saint Abu Hasira before he leaves Egypt have been met with the disaster of being turned away by the police after an enquiry. When he reaches America he decides to look into the matter.

> Looking through the libraries, in search of material on Sidi Abu Hasira, I wasted a great deal of time looking under subject headings such as 'religion' and 'Judaism'- but of course that tomb, and others like it, had long been wished away from those shelves, in the process of shaping them to suit the patterns of the Western academy. Then, recollecting what my interrogator had said about the difference between religion and superstition, it occurred to me to turn to the shelves marked 'anthropology and 'folklore'. Sure enough, it was in those regions that my efforts met with their first rewards. (285)

Nirmal of *The Hungry Tide* writes in his journal; "It was as if the whole tide country was speaking in the voice of the poet (Rilke): 'life is lived in transformation' (242). Life is a process of transformation, people go on changing, they grow, they differ, they dissent. Change is a sign of being alive. In this sense tide country is very much alive. Silting over its past it welcomes the present. It is a palimpsest of centuries of border crossings and cultural co-existence. Even though it

might look slightly amnesiac, there are layers of memories in it. And just like Nirmal there will be people everywhere who try to stave off the silt and bring back the tales of survival.

Kusum and Fokir in *The Hungry Tide* can be seen genuflecting when they cross the boundary of the 'land of the sown' into the 'land of the wild'. This is an old demarcation in the tide country. According to the myth of Bon Bibi, after her victory over Dokkhin Rai she very mercifully divides the land between them and lets him live on in the uninhabitable side of the tide country. But this boundary, like every other boundary in the tide country is a shifting one. Men cross this over many a time and tigers, representing the evil Dokkhin Rai, also cross over and attack humans.

The turning point in *Sea of Poppies* is when Deeti crosses a caste line and touches a naked Kalua. Kalua had been mistreated by the landlords because he lost a fight on which they had wagered. They became so infuriated and tried to make him mate with a horse; Deeti witnesses this scene from afar and being the streetwise woman she is, she manages to save an unconscious Kalua from further harassment. Kalua is a lowercaste man and Deeti is an uppercaste woman; they don't even share a glance. In the field, out of an instinctive curiosity, Deeti touches Kalua and this moment of border crossing sets the story in motion.

Meenakshi Mukherjee in *The Perishable Empire* talks about how unlike the 'bhasha' writers of India, Indians who write in English have always had to cater to the demands of a Western audience. Their writings have to be about India, even if they are living in other places, India figures at least as a metaphor in many of them. She writes how Ghosh's writings are different:

> As a different kind of example I will mention Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* (1988), to me the one novel written in the 1980s that will survive all the books that appeared in that boom decade. The novel betrays no anxiety because it attempts to prove nothing and interrogates rather than defines the concept of a totalising India. The novel speculates tentatively on the varieties of human freedom and the bonds across space and time to explore personal relationships. India is neither a metaphor nor a philosophical idea. Calcutta and Dhaka are concrete places, so are New Delhi and London but the boundaries between the countries appear illusory. The book glows with the light of a cartographic imagination and Bartholomew's Atlas plays not a small part in it. Ghosh's geographic inclusiveness is free of anxiety about roots and cultural ties. (184)

Ghosh talks about the ethical nature of his works. He tells Chitra Sankaran how he is against politicizing everything. According to him even though writing needn't be prescriptive it should be ethical:

> I hear a lot of writers say that writing is all political. I think they're really misusing the word "political." I think what they really mean to say is that writing is fundamentally ethical. And it's something that writers feel discomfort with because they don't want to think of themselves as being moralizers or this and that. But in fact that is really what it is. I mean a writer reflects continuously on ethics, on morality, the state of things in the world. Some do it by, as it were, reflecting on the immoral [laughs]. Some do it by reflecting upon conscious ethics or conscious morality. But I think it's really impossible for people to pretend that writing does not address issues of ethics . . . it does. It just constantly addresses the issue of "who are you," "what is

> right conduct, what is wrong conduct." I don't mean to say that writing is necessarily prescriptive . . . I don't think that is what it is at all— that would be much more like philosophy or something and I would not be drawn to that because I don't think I'm in a position to be telling people what they should be doing, as a rule. But I'm very drawn to ethical predicaments— the difficulty of ethical, moral predicaments. (13)

What this chapter tries to illuminate is the shadowy nature of the conventional boundaries as they figure in Ghosh's novels. These blurred boundaries offer a very political statement. Even though Ghosh has reiterated his aversion towards politicising everything in many interviews, the ethics he talks about is a politico-personal thing. It is the world at large which decides what happens in the life of every living thing.

In "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi" Ghosh says when he had to choose between being a writer and being a citizen, he chose the former. *The Shadow Lines* shows the narrator drawing circles in the *Bartholomew Atlas* and ruminating over the concept of distance. It is written: "It seemed to me then that within this circle there were only states and citizens; there were no people at all" (233). For Ghosh there is a telling difference between citizens and people and the former perhaps remind him of the horrors of nationalism. This could be why he chose writing over being a citizen.

> Ghosh visualises "movement" as in some way fundamental to human experience, not necessarily seeing it as involving a physical journey (though it often does) but also as a potentiality that inhabits the consciousness of even those people often regarded as "settled," such as peasants. Indeed,

> much of his works challenge the assumption that human history is one of "settled" populations and "stable" cultures." (Mondal, 3)

Ghosh's histories are never about 'settled populations' or 'stable cultures'. In an interview with "The Hindu" Ghosh says that 'we are in a moment when the future is still unborn and the past is not quite dead". This is where he situates his novels. His novels are replete with stirrings of the past which is still kicking. He is not talking about the eternal present. The past which is not walled out makes its presence felt in the present. Bhabha says in *The Location of Culture* that in the backdrop of cultural and political diaspora "the boundary becomes the place from which something begins its presencing…"(5). In Amitav Ghosh's writing as well, instead of marking off people, events and things, boundaries become a site where something begins to announce its presence.

What Ghosh writes in *The Imam and the Indian* sums up what he has to say on the matter of Indianness, boundaries, centres and margins:

> If there is any one pattern in Indian culture in the broadest sense it is simply this: that the culture seems to be constructed around the proliferation of differences (albeit within certain parameters). To be different in a world of difference is irrevocably to belong. Thus anybody anywhere who has even the most tenuous link with India is Indian, potentially a player within the culture…. Another of the interesting features of the cultural representation of space in India is that India has always been constituted as much by the notion of the periphery as it has by the notion of the centre. Thus, to take a Hindu example, the dhams [sites of pilgrimage] at the four points of India play no less important a part in the definition of Hindu sacred space than does

> Banaras. … For Sikhs, too, the significance of Patna Sahib lies precisely in that it is not at the centre. (250).

Classification and categorisations disturb the process of knowing. In the novel *The Calcutta Chromosome,* which undertakes a discussion on the character of knowledge Murugan says of the immortal Mangala that "she wasn't hampered by the sort of stuff that might slow down someone who was conventionally trained: she wasn't carrying a shit-load of theory in her head…she didn't care about formal classifications" (209). Caring about formal classification hampers our attempts to 'know'. Ghosh asks in an interview with Claire Chambers: "one of the essential topics of my writing is, what is it to know?.... In a world where everything is known, how do you become what is not known?" (30). Ramachandra Guha in his review of *In an Antique Land* "When Fact Crosses Fiction" writes that "at every step Ghosh's career has mocked the Linnean categories used by intellectuals to demarcate and defend disciplinary boundaries" (451).

Ghosh clarifies why he writes fiction in an interview with Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Makarand R Paranjape :

> The reason I write fiction is that I think the novel to be the most complete form of human expression; it is, so, to speak, the equivalent of the 'unified world' that Einstein dreamed of. Only the novel can incorporate every aspect of human existence; only the novel can bring together such diverse matters as fishing and love, history and cookery. I think it is sad that the contemporary novel has become so interior and so domestic; that it has retreated from the territory that was once its own. Balzac and Herman

> Melville did not only feel any hesitation in writing about financial systems or the natural world. My own interests are similarly wide-ranging….(25-26)

With regard to being prevented from visiting the tomb of Saint Abu Hasira, Ghosh says that he was 'caught straddling a border' which the authorities felt to be very unwelcome. During times when straddling borders is reckoned an unpalatable idea, Ghosh's fiction goes on straddling many conventional borders. He doesn't allow himself to be straitjacketed by any arbitrary boundaries. In a sense his writings go in search of the 'world of accommodations' that was lost long way back. To be categorised into something is to be denied knowledge and true vision in a world where as Bhabha says "the truest eye may now belong to the migrant's double vision" (5).

In John C Hawley's *Amitav Ghosh* Ghosh talks about his view that national boundaries are set to control and manipulate our thought (9). Not just national boundaries, all rigid categorisations straitjacket our thinking. That something could spill over these lines, that there is a way of transcending these lines, that between quintessential black and white there are areas that are grey, that centres may not always hold, that land masses may fall apart and still stay connected all form part of Ghosh's writing.

Chapter 5

The Uncanny: The Unhomely in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh

> Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed. These spheres of life are linked through an 'in-between' temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history. This is the moment of aesthetic distance that provides the narrative with a double edge, … a difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality. And the inscription of this borderline existence inhabits a stillness of time and strangeness of framing that creates the discursive 'image' at the crossroads of history and literature, bridging the home and the world. (Bhabha, 13)

The strangeness and the uncanny stillness that accompany a narrative that deals with cross roads and in-between temporalities is something we find in many places in Ghosh. Bhabha says a writer does this when he/she is dealing with the borderline existences. As pointed out earlier, Ghosh's characters are unsure of their homes. Some are at home in the world. To make tangible the interstitial, 'in-between' realities Ghosh makes use of the technique of the uncanny. This chapter discusses the uncanny elements in Amitav Ghosh's fiction. Using the strange and

the uncanny is a technique that highlights the 'interstitial' realities of the third space which is neither familiar, nor unfamiliar but a combination of both.

Freud's essay 'The Uncanny" begins with a discussion of the word uncanny. Freud goes to Latin, Greek, English, French, Spanish, Italian, Hebrew, Portuguese and Arabic equivalents of 'unheimlich' and then returns to the German word 'Heimlich' and expounds on its many meanings. He reaches the conclusion that "*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *Heimlich"(624).* The word itself is in a transformation. When the word becomes itself and its opposite it becomes the third word which arises out of the first and second; a very hybrid process of semantics.

> If we are seeking a 'worlding' of literature, then perhaps it lies in a critical act that attempts to grasp the sleight of hand with which literature conjures with historical specificity, using the medium of psychic uncertainty, aesthetic distancing, or the obscure signs of the spirit world, the sublime and the subliminal. As literary creatures and political animals we ought to concern ourselves with the understanding of human action and the social world as a moment when something is beyond control, but it is not beyond accommodation. (Bhabha, 12)

Amitav Ghosh accommodates several such moments in his oeuvre. Using the 'medium of psychic uncertainty' and the 'obscure signs of the spirit world' he integrates the subliminal uncanny in to his works. In *Provincializing Europe* Chakravarty says that supernatural beings in fiction "are parts of the different ways of being through which we make the present manifold; it is precisely the

disjunctures in the present that allow us to be with them" (111-112). Thus using the notion of uncanny is a way of unveiling the manifold aspects of the present. Susan E. Linville in her book *History Films, Women, and Freud's Uncanny* writes how from the perspective of Bhabha "the aesthetics best suited for configuring the historical past reveals it as always already intruding on and intermingling with the present, thereby creating in-between spaces and interwoven temporalities in which innovation, interruption and expose occur"(19).

Mladen Dolar in the essay "I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night": Lacan and the Uncanny" talks about Lacan's equivalent of the uncanny/unheimlich-namely extimitè.

> This term aims directly at the essential dimension of psychoanalysis. Putting this simply, one could say that traditional thought consisted of the constant effort to draw a clear line between the interior and the exterior. All the great philosophical conceptual pairs-essence/appearance, mind/body, subject/object, spirit/matter, etc.-can be seen as just so many transcriptions of the division between interiority and exteriority. Now the dimension of extimitè blurs this line. It points neither to the interior nor to the exterior, but is located there where the most intimate interiority coincides with the exterior and becomes threatening, provoking horror and anxiety. The extimitè is simultaneously the intimate kernel and the foreign body; in a word, it is *unheimlich.* (6)

So the concept of uncanny is one that points to a blurring of the lines between several binaries. It is at the same time intimate and foreign. It is neither of the exterior nor interior; it better explains the third space of Bhabha. Bernstein in the

essay “It Walks: The Ambulatory Uncanny” tells how the discourse of the uncanny erases the distinguishing lines between things and makes it difficult to differentiate between presence/absence or coming/going:

> The discourse of the uncanny destroys the illusion of a stable subject position, of a final meaning, of a sense separable from language and the body. It points to the finitude and temporality of thinking, as Weber makes clear in "Uncanny Thinking," and "marks the spot where what is (there) and what is not, presence and absence, coming and going, can no longer be clearly distinguished. (1135)

In his essay “The Uncanny” Freud talks about real life experiences of uncanny phenomena. He also gives literary examples. He says how the uncanny in real life may not seem so uncanny when reproduced in literature.

> The German word unheimlich is obviously the opposite of *Heimlich, heimish,* meaning “familiar,’ “native,” “belonging to the home”; and we are tempted to conclude that what is ‘uncanny’ is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar. Naturally not everything which is new and unfamiliar is frightening, however; the relation cannot be inverted. We can only say that what is novel can easily become frightening and uncanny; some new things are frightening but not by any means all. Something has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar to make it uncanny. (620)

The logic of the uncanny works by turning the familiar into the unfamiliar. It is also an understanding that things that we know are not always the things that we thought them to be. In this sense the uncanny questions our ability to know. It is the understanding that we don’t know much; this debate with the process of knowing is

a favourite trope of Ghosh. How much can one know, how deeply can one know, how precisely can one know; all these are studied in the novels. Shombhu, the weaver in *The Circle of Reason* learns the secret art of Jamadani weaving and tries to teach his family this new skill. He had endured many things to master this new technique. Jamadani weaving was practised by a special caste called Boshaks. They never let an outsider learn it. The secrets of their gossamer weaves were contained within them. Shombhu, when he was twelve years old passes off as an orphan and learns the skill from the master-weaver. When he comes back to his village and tries to disperse his knew knowledge, they put a stop to his endeavours: "we know what we know…and we want to know no more. A crow falls out of the sky if it tries to learn peacockery" (73). Even transgressing the limits of what one should know is seen as an unpardonable offence.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome* Murugan asks Antar whether he really wants to know. It is uttered more like a challenge; because to know also is to be responsible. To know something imbues people with a personal and social responsibility. In *The Hungry Tide* Piya is happy that she and Fokir don't share a language. Knowing his language would be knowing his burdens and miseries. Piya feels she will be better off without knowing either. In the end the knowledge really binds her to the tide country as a socially responsible individual.

Freud talks about how the uncanny has helped man withstand reality. He writes how we all retain elements of it throughout:

> Our analysis of instances of the uncanny has led us back to the old, animistic conception of the universe, which was characterized by the idea that the world was peopled with the spirits of human beings…as well as by all those

> other figments of the imagination with which man…strove to withstand the inexorable laws of reality. It would seem as though each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to that animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has traversed it without preserving certain traces of it which can be reactivated, and that everything which now strikes us as "uncanny" fulfils the condition of stirring those vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression. (633-634)

Freud in his essay writes about the connections the uncanny has with "reflections in mirrors, with shadows, guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and the fear of death." Bennette and Royle talk about how repetition, anthropomorphism, animism, silence, telepathy, death etc as some of the forms that are assumed by the uncanny. This chapter highlights some aspects of the uncanny in Ghosh.

The Unhomely

Home is a confusing concept in Ghosh. This gives rise to the deployment of the feeling of the unheimlich or the uncanny. Even though the tide country doesn't offer itself as a home to anybody, for the refugees from the Bangladesh side of the tide country, this is their only proper home. The topography and the bureaucracy keep on evicting them from their concept of home. Tha'mma of *The Shadow Lines* is in a similar conundrum. For the Indian Rajkumar, Burma feels home, but he spends his last days in India. His Burmese wife who didn't know any home other than Outram House in India spends her last days in Burma. Piya, the Indian with an American nationality chooses the tide country as her home towards the end of the

novel. She sums up her concept of home as "for me, home is where the Oracella are" (427). On the other hand, there is Nilima whose concept of home is more egalitarian and simple. She says "for me home is wherever I can brew a pot of good tea" (427) which is a very subjective position which has got nothing to do with geography.

Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* talks of "the relocation of the home and the world- the unhomeliness- that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (9). Bhabha writes: "The recesses of domestic space becomes sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused, and uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (9).

When history intervenes, what is familiar becomes the contrary. According to Bhabha, it is history which makes the familiar world uncanny. Bhabha quotes Goethe's "Note on World Literature" in *The Location of Culture*. Goethe says that the terrible wars and conflicts give rise to a 'cultural confusion' which is a possibility for world literature. After all, these nations are unable to go back to their previous ways of life; they have very unknowingly adopted foreign ideas and manners, and so feel previously unnoticed intellectual as well as spiritual needs. The examination of world literature thus becomes the examination of 'their projection of otherness' to Bhabha. He asks:

> Where once the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees… may be the terrains of world literature. The centre of such a study would neither be the 'sovereignty' of national cultures, nor the universalism of human culture, but a focus on those

> ‘freak social and cultural displacements’ that Morrison and Gordimer represent in their ‘unhomely’ fictions. Which leads us to ask: can the perplexity of the unhomely, intrapersonal world lead to an international theme? (12)

Bhabha goes on to ask whether uncanny can become a topic in world literature. Will the confusions of the homeless be the central part of it? (12). The answer unequivocally is a yes and it is the answer that figures in Ghosh’s writings. His writings are also about the dilemmas of the home-less.

In *The Shadow Lines* we see a grandmother living in India who dreams of “coming home’ to Dhaka. Her idea of home itself is displaced. She is tortured by the incongruity of her place of birth and nationality. When she reaches Dhaka she keeps on asking ‘where is Dhaka?’ Her notion of Dhaka is not synchronised with the reality of Dhaka. Pramod K Nayar writes how the uncanniness of the land is related to the perception of it as a scene, it is the experience of a place that makes it a home. When Tha’mma goes back to Dhaka, Dhaka becomes a scene for her; very much altered from the home of her memories.

The narrator describes Tha’mma as a person living in memories, although she is a professed critic of nostalgia. The narrator says, “people like my grandmother, who have no home but in memory, learn to be very skilled in the art of recollection”(194). Memory and recollection prove to be their antidotes to home-less-ness, their defence against lacking the co-ordinates to go away and come home.

Dolly considers Outram House her home because that is the only house she knows. When Uma, the District Collector’s wife, asks her to go back to Burma she smilingly inquires where shall she go. She doesn’t have a place to go back to, in

Burma. Another homeless person in the novel is Rajkumar who says " I have…no fabric of small memories from which to cut a large cloth" (246). Unlike Tha'mma in *The Shadow Lines*, they don't relive their homes in their memories. Theirs is a curious case of 'unhomely'.

Pramod K Nayar writes about the social relevance of the uncanny in "The Postcolonial Uncanny: The Politics of Dispossession in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*." He writes how the unheimlich or the unhomeliness of certain group of people in the postcolonial era is not simply a physical condition; it is a social and political situation. The land is unable to accommodate certain people. It is always unhomely to them. He writes:

> Morichjhapi's spectral refugee is emblematic of the inadequacy of the postcolonial state to provide a safe "home." Dalits, minorities and other marginalized occupy an "unhomely" space in the postcolonial nation- in fact, many of the refugees in the Sunderbans are Dalits. They are "unhomely" not only in the sense that they are "out of place," without a place on the land or in history, but that the land itself is "unhomely," by virtue of being inhospitable. (89)

Leaving the known world behind can also be a very uncanny experience. In *Sea of Poppies* the indentured labourers and the convicts on the Ibis are distraught as they leave the last island of India. To cling to his sanity Neel makes Ah Fatt narrate stories of Canton. Frantic, some of the coolies jump overboard, only to perish in the waters of the sea. Even death seems better than leaving a familiar place for a totally strange and unfamiliar one. The thought of being ousted from familiarity itself is scary. In *The Circle of Reason* when his house bursts in to flames moments after he

leaves, Alu tries to run back to the house now aflame. When Bolai da tries to hold him, he fights hard because the thought of leaving the known world behind was appalling. This is the reason why the refugees from Bangladesh seek the shores of the tide country. They can't get acclimatised to the dryness of a place like Dandakaranya. It's totally unfamiliar to them. They need the reassurance of the familiar muddy banks.

The concept of home is not cast in stone. Sometimes the definition takes a detour to its opposite. Fakrul Alam in *The Mythos of Return and Recent Indian English Diasporic Fiction* talks about this heterogeneous understanding of the concept of home:

> Home in not a few Indian novels now is constituted by global circulation, and the act of moving back and forth across borders and cultures appears with considerable frequency in them. In other words, home is no longer something left behind or built after abandoning one in the Indian subcontinent but constituted out of crisscrossing and transnational journeys. The central characters of these novels are quite peripatetic but their meanderings paradoxically lead to a stronger – albeit heterogeneous – perception of home. (256)

An example would be Jyoti Das of *The Circle of Reason*. For him the concept of home is the sum total of his peregrinations. In *The Circle of Reason* Jyoti Das thinks that "foreign places are all alike in that they are not home. Nothing binds you there" (286). At another point it is written of him: "…for he knew suddenly that al-Ghazira wasn't a real place at all, but a question: are foreign countries merely not-home, or are they all that home is not? (289). In the end he decides not to return to

his home. He makes the foreign countries, the unfamiliar locales, his home. He feels that the most important thing about a journey is leaving. For him the moment he set out from India the journey was over, because it was a mental process than a physical one. The uncanny according to Freud is a human understanding of house and home. It means a space where the inhabitant is “at home” and “not at home”. Uncanny is this understanding of familiarity and strangeness of the same thing. It is at the same time “mine’ and “not mine”.

Another example would be the people of the tide country. In a sense the tide country can never be a home because home is where one is free from fear. In “The Postcolonial Uncanny; The Politics of Dispossession in Amitav Ghosh's "*The Hungry Tide*” Pramod K Nayar speaks about the unhomeliness of Sunderbans; it is inhospitable to the dalits who seek refuge there. (89) He talks about how the Sundarbans never yielded to any attempts of the Europeans or local people to colonize it. Hamilton tried to create a casteless society there which was almost utopian.

> But, Ghosh notes, no human settlement could flourish because of the predators and the very nature of the land. Ghosh has here foregrounded the impossibility of inhabiting the Sunderbans: the islands could never really be "home" because home implies stability, security and freedom from fear. It is in a sense of the home and homelessness in the now-land, now-water Sunderbans that the postcolonial uncanny emerges. (89)

Sundarbans by virtue of its geographical setting is a thoroughly unhomely place for human beings. It is a land which survives because the tides have been favourable to it so far. If they decide to rise some feet above than usual the erstwhile

land would become water. The people there always live in fear of nature. Either there is a tiger behind that tree or the tide is so high as to submerge their land. It's always a precarious existence. But still it's homely for them. The Morichjhapi people are "tide country people" who can't survive in the dry land that has been provided. To have the sense of a "home' again they go in search of uninhabited tide country islands. Even Piya at the end of the novel could be seen describing the tide country as home.

In *The Shadow Lines* the narrator could be seen talking about the vulnerability of his home. He lives a precarious life which would shed its secure nature if he fails in one or two exams. Dirk Weimann writes in *Genres of Modernity : Contemporary Indian Novels in English*: "Ghosh's text is replete with indicators of houses' vulnerabilities to outside threats: most dramatically in form of the memories of bombed-out houses in the Blitz of London, but just as much in reference to the oppressive encroachment of anxieties of social degradation upon the (Indian) middle-class home"(239).

Pramod K Nayar writes about Sundarbans:

> It is a home where the sureties of home do not exist. It is home and yet not-home. The refugees in Morichjhapi discover this in a violent state-sponsored massacre: to them is denied the right to (re)claim the tide country as home. In order to emphasize the unhomely nature of this home/land Ghosh traces the history of human colonization of this strange land: the "Arakanese, the Khmer, the Javanese. ... It is common knowledge that almost every island in the tide country has been inhabited at some time or the other". (89)

Kanai and Piya perceive the Sundarbans as the uncanny, strange as well as familiar . Nirmal describes the tide country to Kanai in the novel: "there were no people, no embankments,no fields. Just *kada ar bada*, mud and mangrove. At the high tide most of the land vanished under water. And everywhere you looked there were predators- tigers, crocodiles, sharks, leopards (54). Such a land is a physical manifestation of the feeling of the uncanny. Nayar says that "It is in a sense of the home and homelessness in the now-land, now-water Sunderbans that the postcolonial uncanny emerges" (90).

Un/canny People.

Ghosh's fiction is strewn with people who prefer the fence between the canny and the uncanny. Shombhu Debnath in *The Circle of Reason*, Tridib in *The Shadow Lines* and Fokir in *The Hungry Tide* are some cases in point. These are people to whom normal rules of societal conduct don't apply, nor do they care about them. They may seem familiar, but they don't let the illusion hang on. According to Freud, the uncanny most often results from a change that a familiar thing undergoes to become unfamiliar. These people and the impressions they create on people evoke the feeling of the uncanny by drifting from the familiar to the less familiar.

Shombhu, Tridib and Fokir most often are ordinary people living ordinary lives. A person like Fokir is even considered infantile and addressed that way by worldly people like Kanai and Horen. Shombhu is scolded by his daughter Maya and Tridib in Thamma's opinion is a person who never quite grows up. The source of the feeling of the uncanny, Freud writes is commonly an infantile fear or an infantile wish or an infantile belief. These infantile people apart from being uncannily canny by themselves often give the people creepy feelings as well. People

are often wary of them and keep a safe distance from them exactly as they themselves keep from others.

Shombhu Debnath when he returns to the village of Lalpukur with his wife and kid builds a house 'at a marked distance' from the other people (73). He keeps on disappearing into the forest again and again; when Alu goes to learn weaving from him, the forest doesn't yield him for several days altogether. All of them prefer seclusion, if it is the wilderness for Shombhu, for Tridib it is his ruins; for Fokir it is the solitude of the river.

But they don't choose to be perennial recluses; they stroll back in to the society for brief intervals. After a few weeks' immersion in the old family house at Ballygunge, Tridib walks into the commotion of Calcutta's addas, disrupts his digestive system with the hot teas served there, goes to his nephew's home, flies to London or Dhaka; Fokir after floating over the river for days on end rows to the shore, joins the crowd that hunts down a tiger; Shombhu emerges out of the forest and agrees to teach in Balaram's School of Reason.

They prefer not to toe the lines drawn for them by the others. *The Circle of Reason* describes Shombhu this way:

> People who had known Shombhu Debnath and his family in Noakhali used to say that he had always been like that: restless, unpredictable, fond of heights. A little mad too: that was why he sang. Only those who didn't know him well were surprised when he first disappeared at the age of twelve from the quiet, reassuring huddle of his father's and uncles' and cousins' huts….(71)

He doesn't heed such reassurances greatly; he despises the world where no one can 'make a beautiful thing alone' (87). Tridib in *The Shadow Lines* is a character who doesn't fit in anywhere. He is someone who as per the narrator never uses time. But his time doesn't begin to well up and stink as Tha'mma's concept of time goes. When everyone in his family is a big shot, with his father working in the Foreign Service and brother in the U.N, he prefers to live in his ancestral home in Calcutta; when he could be anywhere with his connections, he chooses to be in the old family house with his aging grandmother. When Piya visits Fokir's home in *The Hungry Tide* she sees him sitting on the door frame, neither inside the house, nor outside, a kind of hybrid space that is referred to in the third chapter. Fokir, though he lives in destitution, is not tempted by money, a thing that Kanai is at a loss to understand because Kanai is somebody who believes in the narratives of hard work and prosperity. Fokir doesn't want to get on with the world, and he doesn't have any dilemmas regarding sacrificing his life to save Piya's.

These people are highly insightful, the surfaces don't fool them. In *The Circle of Reason* Shombhu tells Balaram that he and Bhudeb Roy are two sides of an apple with the only difference that one half is raw and the other rotten (152). When Alu begins to experiment with jamadani weaving Shombhu like the mythical Dronacharya demands his thumbs so that he will never again weave. Though Alu runs away from him and saves his thumbs later in Algeria he finds out that his thumbs have become dysfunctional. In a quaintly insightful way Shombhu leaves Balaram's house hours before it is consumed by fire. For Tridib knowing anything is possible only through real desire, 'a longing for everything that was not in oneself' (29). This desire, which is not greed or lust is what leads the narrator towards the

'redemptive mystery.' He is the one who educates the narrator on the necessity of having hybrid spaces around, for him their deletion makes living bland and monotonous. Fokir also is uncannily insightful; he has a sage-like understanding of his surroundings. He is the one who helps Kanai's transformation from a self-absorbed urbane male to a much more complicated, multi-dimensional character. He has acute senses and sensibilities, and from the beginning of the novel when the reader first sees him jumping in to the river to save Piya, he is a man who is readily and peacefully waiting for death which he knows is not that far away.

People around these people are always unsure of them, they are never to be trusted fully. Sometimes listening to Tridib would let a student get through an exam with all the questions rightly predicted by him. At the same time he could be misleading people and making them say things at interviews which will land them in trouble. People make speculations regarding his whereabouts but none clarifies with him. Even if he talks about his family, people are divided about whether to believe him or not. When he talks about his recent visit to London to a wide- eyed audience, the narrator corrects him and tells him that he hadn't gone anywhere but was staying at his house in Ballygunge Place. People laugh at Tridib for cooking up stories and Tridib laughs along with them and turns the tables by saying when people tend to believe everything that they are told, they deserve to be told anything. It makes all uneasy;

> …it seemed now that he had made them the victims of a complicated private joke. There was an edgy hostility in their voices when he left. You can't believe a word he says…he just likes to bamboozle people and play jokes on

> them. But another sharper voice broke in and said, joke? He wasn't joking, he believed everything he said: it was no joke, the fact is that he is a nut. (12)

The last enigmatic thing he does is running in to a riotous mob bent on lynching. This madness and unreadability are there in Shombhu as well, he is the one who dares to douse Bhudeb Roy, who has a sway over the villagers and is becoming something of an unchallenged leader in the village, with carbolic acid. Bhuded Roy refuses to be provoked by his taunts, voiced from his perch on a tree because he is afraid of him. Shombhu takes money from Balaram for teaching Alu and doesn't so much as see him for almost a month. When Fokir leaves Kanai in Garjontola Kanai feels that he is no more the naïve infantile person he had taken him to be, his eyes had grown opaque and unreadable. Just like Tridib he leaves the reader wondering about why he decided to play the ultimate host by giving up his life to save his guest, Piya. Fokir always has an inscrutability of a mystic around him and nobody knows till the end what has been driving him all along.

Fokir, Tridib and Shombhu are people who have traces of familiarity and unfamiliarity. They are infantile people who become eerily uncanny at times, they are sane and insane, known and unknown. They are open as well as secretive, loyal as well as untrustworthy, social as well as reclusive. They are un/canny people who keep the reader mystified over their motives, drives and courses of action.

Premonitions , Dreams

Freud in his essay talks of how uncanny are the "presentiments which 'usually' come true" (633). Ghosh talks about lots of instances of premonitions in his novels. People dream about things that are about to happen, they fantastically presage occurrences which are actually in the offing, they have premonitions of

disaster. More than the disaster this foretelling adds to the atmosphere of the uncanny.

In *Sea of Poppies* Deeti envisages Ibis months before she actually sets her eyes on it. She has a vision of the vessel when she is taking a bath in the holy river Ganga with her daughter Kabutri. She is triggered into the vision by Kabutri's casual questions. Once she sees it she knows that the ship is going to be something important in her life. She attempts to sketch it for her daughter. Once finished she keeps the sketch in her shrine. When Kabutri asks her why, she replies prophetically: "I just know that it must be there; and not just the ship, but also many of those who are in it; they too must be on the walls of our pooja room" (9). Just as she said all of them slowly occupy their niches in Deeti's seaborne shrine on Ibis.

Fokir of *The Hungry Tide* towards the end of his life has premonitions of it. He sees his dead mother in a dream who urges him to take his son to Garjontola so that she could see him. It is when he is taking his child to Garjontola that he meets Piya, which ultimately leads to his death. In the dream his mother had told him of his impending death as well. He says, "my mother had come to me in a dream and she had said, ' I want to see your son; why do you never bring him to Garjontola? It will soon be time for you and me to be reunited- after that who knows when I will see him again? Bring him to me as soon as you can'". (332)

In *The Circle of Reason* just before Kulfi's death the novel gives several signs that foretell the event. Zindi has her premonitions, she says, "I can smell death in this house: it's there in writing- one of us isn't going to leave this house alive" (424). When Dr. Uma gives Alu the book *The Life of Pasteur* it tumbles out of his hands and slips to the door. It falls open at a page and they see a paragraph

underlined with red pencil. Uma believes that when a book opens like this it signifies something. Almost prophetically the underlined paragraph reads: “without the germ life would become impossible because death would be incomplete” (428). Uma looks around the room and wonders who was being pointed out by the book.

Ma Taramony had foretold Baboo Nob Kissin’s transformation in *Sea of Poppies*. She was the spiritual mentor of Nob Kissin and just before her death she had told him that his dream of uniting with her will happen only when he becomes Ma Taramony, another case of interpersonal transfer. “There will come a day when my spirit will manifest in you, and then the two of us…will achieve the most perfect union…. There will be signs. You must keep careful watch…but when they show themselves…you must follow them wherever they lead, even if they take you across the sea” (165). Crossing the seas was a taboo for a Hindu of the period. Still in the end Baboo Nob Kissin crosses it to achieve his salvation. Ma Taramony lets herself be heard in Baboo Nob Kissin’s head quite often when he begins to sail on the Ibis. She prompts him and urges him to yield to the maternal feelings in him.

Toru Debi is presented in *The Circle of Reason* as a woman for whom weaving is everything in life. Her life revolves round her sewing machine. It is she who foresees that their family is going to suffer because of Balaram’s obsession with phrenology and the so-called sciences. She can tell that the danger resides in their relation with Bhudeb Roy’s family and she does everything in her power to keep them humoured. She asks Balaram to read less and know less, she asks him to live and let live, she needs to live in peace, she tells him. When he refuses to listen to her, Alu consoles her that nothing would happen. “Something will happen, she said. I know it will; I’ve seen it in my dreams. But still I’ll do what I can to stop it. I’ll

keep on trying as long as I can" (100). Even the highly objective and rational Balaram has premonitions of the diasaster that was to follow. It is written: "He had a strange feeling that something unusual was happening in his own house…"(147).

Shombhu of *The Circle of Reason* also is a very strange character who prefers the trees to the ground. He is a weaver who wears minimal clothes, he knows everything, he has premonitions. After Balaram announces that their School of Reason is a success Shombhu asks him whether that's enough for him. Shombhu knows Balaram has something else in mind and its only days later that Balaram announces the third department of the school; Department of the March of Pure Reason. Before Shombhu leaves the house with Parboti Debi and their daughter he tells Balaram to put an end to his obsession with carbolic acid and Bhudeb Roy. He asks him to take a break and go to Calcutta on a holiday. But Balaram is in such a frenzy that he doesn't even comprehend what Shombhu is talking about. Shombhu shakes him by the shoulder an d shouts at him, "you'll destroy everyone without even stopping to think about it."(155) In the end it is what Balaram does. The fierceness of his gods was so much that none of his family could cope with it. But for Alu, all of them are killed that night itself.

Mirrors and Doubling

The uncanny according to Freud is based on doubling and repetition. Mirrors, doubling and shadows find a very privileged position in Ghosh's works as suggested in the earlier chapters. Mladen Dolar in the essay "I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night" refers to Otto rank's *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* and writes about his ideas regarding shadows and mirror images.

> Otto Rank gives an extensive account of the theme of the double in different mythologies and superstitions. For all of them the shadow and the mirror image are the obvious analogues of the body, its immaterial doubles, and thus the best means to represent the soul. The shadow and the mirror image survive the body due to their immateriality--so it is that reflections constitute our essential selves. The image is more fundamental than its owner: it institutes his substance, his essential being, his "soul"; it is his most valuable part; it makes him a human being. It is his immortal part, his protection against death. (12-13)

Dimitris Vardoulakis in "The Return of Negation: The Doppelganger in Freud's "The Uncanny" talks about doppelgangers: " Doppelganger characters tend to be associated with evil and the demonic; thus one can infer that the Doppelganger presents a notion of the subject/subjectivity that is defective, disjunct, split, threatening, spectral"(100). There are many doppelganger characters in Ghosh's novels. The narrator of *The Shadow Lines* is Tridib's doppelganger. Balaram has been described as the double of his arch-enemy Bhudeb Roy in *The Circle of Reason*. The novel describes Bhudeb Roy when he is delivering a speech in his school: "He stopped and his eyes scanned the crowd unerringly with an inevitable certainty, they found Balaram, his alter ego, his *doppleganger*, the twin who had journeyed with him so long through the same school…" (108). Towards the end of *The Hungry Tide* Nilima has difficulty in telling apart Piya and Fokir's wife because they look so alike. In *The Shadow Lines* when Maya Thakumma and his grandmother fold their hands over the narrator in an act of showering blessings the narrator feels that one is the mirror image of the other.

In *Dancing in Cambodia and Other Essays* Ghosh writes that when the French accidentally 'discovered' Angkor Wat they "did indeed make a discovery. They discovered a mirror for themselves: of the Imperial State" (53). Mirrors and doubling are common features in Ghosh as pointed out in an earlier chapter which described the heterotopia of mirrors. Cixous talks of how inevitabily the hybrid body of fiction talks about doubling, silence and death: "Neither real nor fictitious, fiction" is a secretion of death, an anticipation of nonrepresentation, a doll, a hybrid body composed of language and silence that, in the movement which turns it and which it turns, invents doubles, and death." (548)

Bhabha talks of uncanny doubling in *The Location of Culture*. Mladen Dolar in the essay "I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night" writes about the concept of double.

> The double produces two seemingly contradictory effects: he arranges things so that they turn out badly for the subject, he turns up at the most inappropriate moments, he dooms him to failure; and he realizes the subject's hidden or repressed desires so that he does things he would never dare to do or that his conscience wouldn't let him do. In the end, the relation gets so unbearable that the subject, in a final showdown, kills his double, unaware that his only substance and his very being were concentrated in his double. So in killing him he kills himself. (11)

How the subject is led to exterminating his double thus exterminating himself is suggested in the passage. Balaram in *The Circle of Reason* thinks that Bhudeb Roy is messing with his life. His relation with Bhudeb worsens with every passing year.

In Balaram's case his misbegotten plans don't go well and his double ends up killing the subject, that is Balaram.

"The feeling of the uncanny would seem to be generated by being reminded of the repetition compulsion, not by being reminded of whatever it is that is repeated. The becoming aware of the process is felt as eerie, not the becoming aware of some particular item in the unconscious" (Hertz, 101). In the notes to his essay "The Postcolonial Uncanny: The Politics of Dispossession in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*" Pramod K Nayar points to numerous instances of doubling, repetition, repetitive walking in *The Hungry Tide* and tells how all this add to the overall feeling of the uncanny. "This curious doubling of the animal-smell-atmosphere in the case of Piya and the tide country is an excellent example of Ghosh's spectropoetics" (102). Nayar talks about the idea of doubling in *The Hungry Tide.* Here the dispossessed people of the tide country are described as searching for a place that is a double of their concept of home:

> 'Ghosh's novel appropriates the "condition" of the uncanny in order to speak of dispossession and of those who lose their sense of home. The dispossessed seek a new home that resembles-doubles-the search for familiarity is an uncanny doubling- their old home…. When the refugees arrive from Bangladesh, they encounter very different sort of land. These are, as one of the refugees informs Kusum, "tide country people," and yet the government shifts them to "a dry emptiness." All they want to do is to "plunge their hands once again in our soft, yielding tide country mud," to return to a place that recalls their home-land. (90)

Nayar talks in detail of the several layers of doubling the reader encounters while going through *The Hungry Tide*. It is personal, geographical, epistemological and political.

> …the double engendered by the tide country confounds mapping, geological accuracy and even vision. This is why, towards the end of the novel Kanai tells Piya he would like her to see him on his own terrain, not in tide country's "unchartered ground" (353). The "unchartered" refers to the uncanny perception engendered by the amorphous, shifting land and water. It also refers directly, it seems to me, to the inability to comprehend the tide country. "Unchartered" gestures not only at the lack of clear vision to map the place but also to the frightening epistemological uncanny of being in the tide country. Politically this suggests an absence of regulated, bounded territory and, since citizenship is territorial, a questionable citizenship for the inhabitants there.... (96-97)

In *The Shadow Lines* the narrator talks about a “land of looking glass events” (224). He speaks of the land of reflections when he gets to know from a newspaper collection that a riot in Calcutta is the continuation of a riot in Pakistan, which is followed by similar riot in Dhaka. This world of ‘looking glass events’ is not hindered by the arbitrary line that men have drawn across the maps. Again in Europe the situation during the First World War is described in a similar fashion. Moving from Germany to London a character feels that he has just walked into a mirror.

In *Sea of Poppies* Zachary Reid looks “at an almost unrecognizable image of himself in the mirror” (19). Fokir is described as an image reflected in a rear-view mirror in *The Hungry Tide*. “Piya understood too that this was a looking glass in

which a man like Fokir could never be anything other than a figure glimpsed through a rear view mirror, a rapidly diminishing presence" (237). Robi, the civil servant elucidates how terrorism is the mirror image of patriotism. *The Circle of Reason* describes Balaram and Bhudeb Roy as being mirror images of each other; "their heads were remarkably alike at the time; almost mirror images of each other" (21). Even though Balaram later considers Roy as his arch enemy the novel continues to describe them as two identical figures.

Meenakshi Mukherjee in her essay "Maps and Mirrors: Co-ordinates of Meaning in *The Shadow Lines*" writes about the narrator of the novel as Tridib's reflected image (259). Nick is referred to by the narrator as a 'spectral presence beside me in my looking glass.' Meenakshi Mukherjee continues that even though the novel is very detailed about certain things regarding certain others it leaves the reader in the lurch. For example, we never know the name of the narrator, we have only descriptions of those people whose mirror image he is; like when he says Tridib looked like him or Ila could have been his twin sister.

Mirroring can be a horrifying experience especially when a vast expanse of waters mirrors a turbulent sky. Phulboni, in *The Calcutta Chromosome,* on his unforgettable journey to Renupur railway station resorts to sight-seeing near the train windows. He looks out and sees the restless rivers which overflow their banks in the monsoon. He reminisces that these rivers which are not a pleasant experience to those who engage with them daily, offer a serene picture to the distant passer-by. He sees "the majestic, endless plain mirroring the turbulent heavens" (219). In *The Hungry Tide,* a drenched Kanai after the storm looks up at the sky and discerns the multiplicities of its shades: "It was as though the sky had become a dark-tinted

mirror for the waters of the tide country, with their myriad cross-cutting currents, eddies and whirlpools, all with their slight but still discernible distinctions of colouring" (405).

Secrets and Silence

In "The Uncanny" Freud refers to "Schelling's definition of the uncanny as something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light" (26). Uncanny is a secret kept in silence, but inadvertently revealed. Secrets and silence are aplenty in Ghosh. In some of the works like *The Calcutta Chromosome* he goes as far as even deifying it. It is written in *The Calcutta Chromosome*: "Every city has its secrets…but Calcutta whose vocation is excess, has so many more secrets than any other" (26). Calcutta's secrets are preserved in its silences, the novel says. Murugan talks of counter-science in the novel: "wouldn't you say that the first principle of a functioning counter-science would have to be secrecy? …it wouldn't just have to be secretive about *what* it did…it would also have to be secretive in what it did. It would have to use secrecy as a technique or procedure" (91).

Silence can be very uncanny. Phulboni could be seen praying to the mysterious goddess of silence in *The Calcutta Chromosome*.

> The silence of the city . . . has sustained me through all my years of writing: kept me alive in the hope that it would claim me too before my ink ran dry. For more years than I can count I have wandered the darkness of these streets, searching for the unseen presence that reigns over this silence, striving to be taken in, begging to be taken across before my time runs out. The time of crossing is at hand, I know, and that is why I am here now,

> standing in front of you: to beg— to appeal to the mistress of this silence, that most secret of deities, to give me what she has so long denied: to herself to me. (27)

In another chapter Mrs. Aratounian could be seen watching this speech on TV. She is very contemptuous of all the things that Phulboni says. She tells Murugan that Phulboni is just a pompous windbag. This is a curious incident. We come to know towards the end of the novel that Mrs. Aratounian is the reincarnated Mangala; Murugan the person who investigates in to the practices of the cult, and Phulboni the one who wants to be initiated into the cult. Aratounian is contemptuous of the speech because Phulboni has gone against the dictum of being silent about the cult. She accuses him of making an appalling exhibition of himself whereas the working principle of the Mangala cult is that none of its followers should make themselves conspicuous. He has written stories about Lakhaan, the right hand of Mangala and has inadvertently told his lover of a mysterious experience of his which again is related to the cult. He has broken the taboos related to the cult and has fell out of its favour.

When Dr.Cunningham reaches Countess Pongracz seeking asylum they hold a séance to find a solution to whatever was haunting him. During the séance, Cunningham is thrown backward and tortured by unseen forces. “His face was livid with fear, and they saw him flailing his arms, fighting something off…. They saw him cowering on the floor…he seemed…to be grappling with an animal…shouting a repetitive string of invocations” (181). At the end of it all Mme Salminen, the one who is the lens for the energy around, declares that saving him is beyond her, “the Silence has come to claim him” (181).

Freud asks in the essay "The Uncanny": "…whence come the uncanny influences of silence, darkness and solitude?" (32). There is a scene in *The Circle of Reason* that reveals the strange influence of silence and darkness. Two labour contractors had come to al- Ghazira as usual to pick up labourers. But by then Ras had been obsessed with Alu's ideas of dirt and purity. They have developed their own ways of finding work and supporting themselves. They inform the contractors of their new methods and invite them to join their endeavour. This infuriates the contractors and they try to kill the leader of the group by running their car over him. The labourers respond very peacefully. The contractors are taken to the local court which is almost like a khap panchayat. The court decrees that for bringing germs to the village these people needed to be bathed in carbolic acid. The contractors in the beginning thought it was all a joke, they even try to laugh it away. But when they try to appeal to the people around, they don't say a thing, instead they stare very straight at the duo. Nobody took their eyes off, nobody said a word, the whole scene is primevally horrifying. Stunned and horrified, the pair bathe before the whole group surrounded by night and stark silence. Unable to stand the horror Jyoti Das flees from the scene.

Bishnupriya Ghosh writes of the haunting nature of secrets in *The Calcutta Chromosome*. These secrets spur them onto their ends. Secrets have agency in the novel, they make things happen:

> Each major character in the novel is haunted by a secret that links him or her to the vital calcutta chromosome mystery: Mangala and Murugan are syphilitics with personal investments in malarial research; the glamorous Sonali is in search of her natural father; Phulboni stumbles upon corporeal

> immortality and craves it to compensate for the more insubstantial immortality of authorship; and so on. These investments turn the larger postcolonial epistemological ventures into tales of personal sustenance. The familiar other beckons the detective, the journalist, the writer, and the missionary to a larger ethical quest. (159)

Pramod K Nayar talks of how secrets form an integral part of *The Hungry Tide.* He refers to the uncanny in the novel as something that manifests itself as a problem of secrecy. He says that secrecy is the core of the novel:

> In HT the land is what does not readily give itself up to interpretation- it is encountered yet disappears, sensed but not always seen, like a secret glimpsed at but not fully revealed. Secrecy is at the heart of both the novel- the secrets of the dolphins' movements that Piya hopes to uncover and the secret of what happened at Morichjhapi in 1978 (the secret lies buried in Nirmal's note books)- and the uncanny. The uncanny is the "problem" of secrecy- whether it is of secret habitations of the tigers, the illegal, "invisible" (and therefore "secret," perhaps?) citizenry of Morichjhapi and of secret knowledges all linked to the terrain, which itself is only partially revealed. (93)

When the narrator's father tells him of Tridib's death he makes him promise that he won't talk of it to anybody, that he would keep it a secret. His father tells him that with Ma Kali's flowers in his hands he is not supposed to break his promise. The novel is the breaking of this promise. The whole of the novel is an attempt to come to terms with Tridib's death. Through many narratives the enigma surrounding this death is unfurled; the narrator's father, Robi and finally May talk of this

excruciating event. From the beginning to the end Tridib permeates the novel. The novel in that sense is a sacrilege. The narrator is elaborately divulging a secret that he had vowed to keep safe holding Ma Kali's flowers. It is an act of transgression.

Fantasy, Dreams and Reality

Freud writes in "The Uncanny" about the effects created by wiping out the borders between imagination and reality: "…an uncanny effect is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something that we hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions and significance of the thing it symbolizes…" (29). This is one technique that Ghosh often uses. Dreams of premonition are common in Ghosh. Another feature of his dreams is that sometimes they cease to be dreams. They become real.

A very famous uncanny episode in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is Phulboni's stay at the Renupur railway station. The scene is very gothic and frightening and Bishnupriya Ghosh writes that Ghosh once told her that the sequence is inspired by Tagore's short story "Khudhita Pashan." Dreams and reality intertwine in this very gothic recount. A young Phulboni reaches Renupur station at night and is welcomed by the station master of the station who tells him that the place is very dangerous at night. The young Phulboni refuses to believe the superstitious old man and decides to spend the night in the signal room. A very scary night ensues and twice Phulboni finds himself sprawled out on the railway track with the sound of a train hurtling towards him. No train passes through Renupur station at that time, but Phulboni wasn't mistaken about his apprehension of the approaching train. He manages to fling himself over and thus escape the speeding train. An inhuman howl echoes

through the night which clearly says ‘Lakhaan’only to be silenced by the train’s rumble. As he returns to the signal room, he touches the rails which are absolutely still. He is confused that the tracks usually should carry the sound of the train which is even a mile away. The train hadn’t disturbed the undergrowth growing over the tracks. Phulboni walks towards the signal room and many eerie events follow. Then the station master comes and as Phulboni is talking to him he has another creepy revelation that he is still on the tracks with the pounding train only a few metres away. Dream ends and reality begins at a nondescript moment. Phulboni fortunately manages to toss himself off the track once again. This time he sees the faces of the people on the train. Adding to the horror he finds out the next morning that Renupur station hasn’t had a station master for more than thirty years and the last occupant of the signal room was a boy named Lakhaan.

The Imam and Indian includes the story ‘Kshudhita Pashan” or “The Hunger of Stones” of Tagore which Ghosh has translated in to English. The story is from the point of view of a sceptic narrator who is listening to a fellow traveller on train who talks about what he calls a personal experience. It’s a very uncanny story in which the narrator, a government servant who during his official stay at Barich chooses to live in a now abandoned palace built by Shah Mahmud II. The palace is empty, vast and silent and during his stay he gets the feeling that it’s a living thing that has eaten him alive. He undergoes several hallucinatory experiences during his stay at the palace. He even feels people nudging him, Arabian dancing women guiding him to exotic women in cosy, luxurious rooms. Certain of them are almost as concrete as real life events. The story “Hunger of Stones” is discussed in connection with *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Critics have referred to Tagore’s story when the events at

Renupur station are described. The line where the dream stops and reality intervenes is never made clear to the reader.

The Calcutta Chromosome has many occasions of effacing of distinctions between imagination and reality. One is when Murugan dreams of an Englishman conducting experiments in a laboratory. He hands over the test tube to the people around him and unable to hold it tight they let it fall on the floor and the test tube shatters. When Murugan wakes up and walks around the room his toe is wounded by a shred of glass, which seems to be from a shattered test tube. Such blending of dreams and reality adds to the effect of the uncanny.

Ghosts and Haunting

Derrida in *Spectres of Marx* writes how a spectre confuses our idea of beginnings and ends. It itself is a repetition: "A question of repetition: a spectre is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back" (11). Cixous talks about ghosts in "Fiction and Its Fantoms." She writes that they are the primary manifestation of the uncanny:

> The direct figure of the uncanny is the Ghost. The Ghost is the fiction of our relationship to death, concretized by the specter in literature. The relationship to death reveals the highest degree of the Unheimliche. There is nothing more notorious and uncanny to our thought than mortality. There is a dazzling section on disputed death, on the failure of death to serve as an instrument of moral order and public authority which is veiled by an ideological belief in the hereafter. (542-543)

In Ghosh we find many literal references to ghosts. Kanai tells Piya that his uncle has "risen from his ashes to summon me" (15). Tigers are described as ghosts

in *The Hungry Tide*: "…the great cats of the tide country were like ghosts, never revealing their presence except through marks, sounds and smells" (114). Nilima tells Kanai that after Nirmal began to get involved with the Morichjhapi settlers he began to treat her as an enemy. "We were like two ghosts living in the same house", she says. (126) Fokir is described as "a ghost from the perpetual past" (237). One of the most read essays of Ghosh is titled "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi." Ghosh describes ghosts in *The Shadow Lines*: "…for that is all what a ghost is, a presence displaced in time. (181). Bishnupriya Ghosh in her work *When Borne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel* writes how using ghosts is a technique of ascribing voice to the voiceless:

> In their fiction, almost all cosmopolitical practitioners have some degree of commerce with specters: The human subjects in these texts inevitably share their novelistic world with ghosts, gods, demons, and other spectral presences. Some of these ghosts are undoubtedly embodiments of forgotten voices returning ferociously to assert their claim on the living present. (157)

In *The Hungry Tide* when Nirmal writes of the refugees' march to Morichjhapi island he says that "They passed us next day-like ghosts" (64). This proves prophetic. For that's what they become later. Ten thousands of them were killed in the state-sponsored massacre. As Pramod Nayar says, these people are 'unheimlich' in the sense that they are unhomely, so itself uncanny. And the word that would most appropriately describe their condition is none other than 'ghosts.'

Bishnupriya Ghosh writes that the ghosts of Amitav Ghosh "collapse the boundaries of present, past and future" (206). She also talks about how Ghosh uses the uncanny to blur the lines between literary genres as well as traditions:

> Ghosting and grafting function metatextually, as Ghosh deliberately muddies the perimeters of literary genres and traditions. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is first a medical thriller, but also a ghost story, a murder mystery, a philosophical rumination, and a historiographic project. Further, Ghosh grafts a larger vernacular tradition of ghost fiction onto this novel in English in the novel's fragmented Lakhaan stories. (154-55)

The first question that Zaghloul, the weaver asks Amitabh in *In an Antique Land* is about ghosts. The narrator is at Ustaz Sabry's house and Ustaz is talking about the centuries long relationships between India and Egypt. He was pointing out the conditions that both the countries have gone through and the similarities of their struggles. After the long speech Zaghloul addresses Ustaz and asks: "And in his country do they have ghosts like we do?" (107). He cites several instances of sightings of ghosts to prove the existence of ghosts. Nashawy is such a place where unnatural deaths force the villagers to stay indoors at night. The supernatural is so much a part of their lives and the language the author uses to speak of them partakes of the horror. He says that the villagers thought that their "houses and ploughs were insubstantial things, ghosts displaced in time, waiting to be exorcized and laid to rest" (163).

Another ghost is that of the elephant trainer in *The Glass Palace*. He was killed in an accident in which he was crushed by a two-ton log. He was forced into the job against his own better judgement by the English camp officer, Mckay. When he died McKay refuses to even sign the note of release which is supposed to free the dead soul from his charges very symbolically. His body is buried without observing this custom. Later that night the elephant of the dead man comes to the camp and

demolishes the tree house in which Mckay stayed. Though Mckay shoots her before she begins her attack at a very vulnerable spot, it is not enough to hold her down. She finishes her attack and falls dead on Mckay who has tumbled down during the demolition, thus crushing him exactly as her master was crushed. When people come near to examine, they see a footprint near the elephant which they assume is of the dead trainer. They all believe that since his note of release was not signed, he came back again, unchained the elephant and administered his revenge.

Bishnupriya Ghosh talks of the ghosting that colonialism engenders. She writes how human producers are transformed into ghosts in *When Borne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel*. Mangala is the ghost scientist who writes the script of Ronald Ross' discoveries.

> The colonial chimera of scientific knowledge affects and bereaves folk and vernacular knowledges, as the story of multinational corporate bio-piracy has so powerfully brought home to us in our current phase of capitalist expansion. To understand the loss of the ownership of knowledge in terms of epistemological robbery with economic implications (medical lab research sold back in the form of pharmaceuticals to the ex-colonial world) is to fully grasp the condemnation of present practices implied in Ghosh's fictionalized materialist critique. The knowledge that is Murugan's legacy from Mangala is not recognized as such, but refracted through the figure of Ronald Ross. Mangala is ghosted in this exchange. And so the "commerce in commodities" transforms "human producers into ghosts". (166)

In his last visit to Egypt the author on the way back is accompanied by Hussein and one of the younger brothers of Ismail. Hussein is Nabeel's brother and

Nabeel and Ismail used to walk with the author during his previous stay in Egypt. When he is walking with the younger duo he is reminded of the earlier walks with their brothers. He says it all felt so eerie, because a moment displaced is always strange. Again comes a reference to ghosts: "It was eerie crossing the village with the two of them beside me. It was as though a moment in time had somehow escaped the hurricane of change that had swept Nabeel and Ismail away to Iraq: the two cousins so much resembled their brothers that I could have been walking with ghosts" (269)

When the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* sits in the cellar of Mrs. Price's house with Ila, he feels that he is surrounded by several ghosts:

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

Dirk Weimann writes in *Genres of Modernity : Contemporary Indian Novels in English*: "Charged with the echoes of this story, the memories of that other cellar in Raibajar, the reminiscences of the night of the dramatic disclosure of the narrator's love for Ila, and the fantasies of air raids, the Hampstead cellar room suddenly acts as a sphere of ghostly conjunctures, if not confusions of time and space."(251)

People are taken for ghosts at times in Ghosh's fiction. In *Sea of Poppies* Heeru's husband takes her to a 'mela' in Sonepur and in the commotion that followed when an elephant ran amuck she becomes separated from him. For several months she sustains herself by begging and doing odd jobs. One day she sees a neighbour from her village and runs to him in delight. "When he recognized her, he fled, as if from a ghost" (243). Again when Deeti appears before her daughter Kabutri she loses consciousness and falls. When she opens her eyes she asks her mother: "Who are you?.... Are you a ghost? What do you want from me?" (194)

Bishnupriya Ghosh writes in *When Borne Across : Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel* that if the reader needs to explain or understand *The Calcutta Chromosome* s/he needs to believe in the premise that Ghosh uses, of transmigration:

> The physical mutations of "natural laws" in this medical thriller can only be explained if we believe in the religio-philosophical premise of transmigration. For instance, Lakhaan's or Lutchman's deformed hand physically migrates to Romen Haldar, providing empirical evidence of Mangala genetic transfers through transmigration, her practice of corporeal immortality. The reality of transmigration assumes centrality as the protagonist Antar becomes the John Malkovichian body, the porthole for grafting other characters in the novel. Antar's final experience of transmigration is further posited as logically commensurable with his (and our) present-day experiences of living multiple and virtual cyberlives. The close of Ghosh's novel suggests the ghostly stirrings of a collectivity in Antar...."(159)

Pramod K Nayar writes of Fokir as the data which has now turned ghostly because it is lost. It is on this insubstantial base that Piya plans to build her project. Without the supporting evidence of data her writing on Oracella Brevistroris seems impressionistic. Still it manages to impress the readers. Nayar writes:

> Fokir then is the ghostly data that will be, in Piya's words, the "foundation" of her project. In a sense, then, Fokir is the spectre that returns to the body of data as incorporation. Both the uncanny and the tide country, unstable, uncertain, unreliable, and therefore, lacking in strong "foundations," suddenly move towards a foundation. The textual ghost of Fokir translates into the indigenous canny to be built upon by Piya and others. Textuality here enables the very material basis of the tide country's (new) world. (111)

Bishnupriya Ghosh writes in *When Borne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel* that the uncanny is a method in the hands of the postcolonial writers to fight the demands of nationalism:

> As unreal presences who force the ground of literary realism and who bring genres into crisis, specters open seams between different times, spaces, and human subjects. In this regard, they inhabit these novels in a Derridean modality, the register of another sort of accounting that rational discourses of reparation or debt cannot entertain. Invested in such a dialogue about political costs, debts, and justice, not to mention a will to postfoundationalist history, the cosmopolitical writers attack violent emplacing (nationalist) inscriptions by trafficking in specters. (168)

Nayar refers to the ‘spectropoetics’ of *The Hungry Tide* (102). He reads the 'spectral refugee' as a comment on the inadequacy of the postcolonial state (105).

Nayar adds “The Indian state is an inhospitable one, for it does not want to offer a home (hospitality) to the (foreign) refugee: he or she is denied any (home)land in order to keep the lands of the state inviolable, for the “locals” and for the animals” (105). So according to Nayar Ghosh uses spectres in his fiction to criticise the nation for its inadequacies.

Ghosts help Ghosh in his blending of genres, in his task of lending voice to the voiceless. These as the ghosts of *The Calcutta Chromosome* have agency. They are not merely insubstantial translucent apparitions which signify absences. They are a method of speaking about those presences which, as Ghosh himself has said in *The Shadow Lines*, are just displaced in time.

Mysteries

Mysteries are everywhere in Amitav Ghosh’s novels. From the mysterious little baby, Boss in *The Circle of Reason* to the strangely dexterous Ah Fatt in *Sea of Poppies* his novels are peopled with enigmatic characters around whom uncanny events take place. Boss is a strange child who never cries unnecessarily. Whenever he cries something strange happens. He doesn’t pee on strange clothes. Alu alias Nachiketa Boss justifies his name by escaping death twice in the novel. One is when he miraculously gets out of the house moments before it is devoured by fire and the second is when he survives the crash of the Star. Ah Fatt is uncannily dexterous; in the cabin to which he is confined on the Ibis he kills insects with a flick of hand in total darkness. Pramod K Nayar in his article points out that Fokir the word itself means a Sufi mendicant, a source of mystic knowledge (114). Mysteries add to the atmosphere of the uncanny.

The fall of the five storeyed building Star in *The Circle of Reason* is described as a very strange thing. Many stories circulate regarding why it fell. A popular one is that it fell because it was built on the grave of a renowned person in al-Ghazira. Another is that it fell because nobody wanted it. Freud talks about these kinds of uncanny beliefs in his essay; people being able to bring destruction on people and things by simply willing it, by simply wanting it to happen. When the building falls, Alu is at the centre of it. But Alu doesn't die in the crash. There are more stories in circulation regarding what happened to Alu adding to the enigma. People like Abu Fahl don't believe in the stories that are in circulation in which Alu survived the crash. They say it is impossible to get out alive from such a collapse. After listening to too many stories and personal accounts Abu Fahl and Rakesh go in search of Alu in the rubble. This is an eerie scene which happens at night. They listen to a shrill whistle which emanates from the centre of the ruin. Inside the rubble they go in search of Alu and Rakesh is once scared off his senses by his reflection in a mirror. Abu Fahl describes the scene: "Like the eager boy that he is, he jumped to his feet and, clear as the light of the day, he saw and I saw a dark shape springing up with him, inches from his face. Rakesh would have screamed or shouted if he could, but all he could do was fall sideways, grasping for breath, his eyes starting from his head" (249). But Alu very curiously is saved by a set of sewing machines which he was planning to ship out of the building when he knew that the building was about to collapse. He stays under the rubble for days without food and water and at last when people reach him, he tells them that that he doesn't want anything, he just needs some more time to think of dirt and cleanliness.

The uncanny habits of Indian rivers fascinate Ghosh who speaks in awe of them. Even their names are fascinating for him, he writes “where the rivers’ names sang like Megh Malhar on a rainy day - the Meghna, the Dholeshwari, the Kirtinosha, the Shitolokhkha, the majestic Arialkha, wider than the horizon” (59). He describes Irawaddy, Matla, Ganga as uncannily canny rivers. Matla is described as a mad woman who cunningly destroys the arrogance of human beings. Sundarbans rises out of a confluence of many rivers like Ganga, Brahmaputra, Hooghly and partakes of the unpredictability of all these rivers. The delta very efficiently silts its past and creates ghosts of its history. They are always ready with a storm which is stealthily kept in the other hand or a tidal wave that wipes out an unaware set of people.

In *Sea of Poppies* Deeti is perceived by the young as a ‘chudaliya’, a witch. Just by turning her face to cast a glance on them she manages to scatter them. It is described in the novel that Deeti enjoys this special stature. People dealing with her are slightly awed by her eyes which seem ‘at once blind and all-seeing.’ This scares them because this is unfamiliar in their part of the country. Things unfamiliar always put people into discomfiture.

Bennete and Royle write about the uncanny aspects of telepathy. An instance of telepathic understanding we find in Ismail of *The Circle of Reason*. Ismail, the youngest son of Hajj Fahmy is considered an idiot. But very oddly he is the one who seems to know things better than others. He finds out Alu in the rubble. When his father dies in the prison, he immediately knows it. When the authorities take Hajj Fahmy’s body to his home the next day they are startled to find the inmates dressed

in mourning. The members of the family knew of it because Ismail told them about the death the minute it happened.

Frowning Abusa and Mast Ram are two mysterious characters in *The Circle of Reason*. Frowning Abusa has an extraordinary gift of making things grow. Mast Ram makes things wither and wilt. When Mast Ram touches the plants that Abusa had magically revived, they die. Abusa's fat pumpkins which were watered by Mast Ram, when cut open reveal they have nothing inside. Abusa's gift fills Mast Ram with admiration. But this admiration only makes things worse. Abusa's rabbits die when Mast Ram begins to take care of them. He is considered a bad omen and his arrival brings bad luck to everybody in Zindi's boarding house. In the end Mast Ram commits a very vengeful suicide. The narration of the suicide itself is uncanny:

> Suddenly like the beginning of the storm, the noise grew until every stray dog in the Ras seemed to be howling together. It was all over and around us, like waves, crashing and breaking on the house. Then Boss began to cry on terrible strangled sobs and a moment later the whole courtyard seemed to explode; every animal in it went into a frenzy, geese honking, chickens screeching…. Inside nobody moved. You could feel your bowels growing cold. There are few things more frightening than the midnight frenzy of animals. (227)

There are several graves that perform miracles in Ghosh. The place upon which the Star stood was the graveyard that contained the remains of Sheikh Musa, a revered figure in al-Ghazira. One of the reasons that is ascribed to the fall of the building is this, that it desecrated a pious place. When Alu is taken out of the ruins he appears unscathed. The novel underscores the miraculous nature of this survival

by talking of it as something that people always say: “One could say: people think these things when something unusual happens…. It came as no surprise to anyone when some of the women there started saying that it was the doing of a dead sheikh whose grave lies under those ruins; one of his many miracles. People say these things” (296). We find another grave that performs a similar adventure in *In an Antique Land*. Sidi Abu Kanaka’s maqam in *In an Antique Land* defies the attempts of authorities to build a canal through the graveyard. The grave yielded not to the bull dozers of the work men but to the touch of his great grandson. The miracle is acknowledged and the men alter their plans.

Freud writes of superstitions in “The Uncanny”:

> one of the most uncanny and wide-spread forms of superstition is the dread of the evil eye…. Whoever possesses something at once valuable and fragile is afraid of the envy of others, in that he projects on to them the envy he would have felt in their place. A feeling like this betrays itself in a look even though it is not put into words; and when a man attracts the attention of others by noticeable, and particularly by unattractive, attributes, they are ready to believe that his envy is rising to more than usual heights and that this intensity in it will convert it in to effective action. (24)

This excerpt brings to mind the character of Balaram in *The Circle of Reason*. Balaram believes that Bhudeb Roy is after his drums of carbolic acid. When Alu tells him that he is in love with Maya, Balaram raises no objections. He just insists that they shouldn’t be in a hurry to marry because Bhudeb Roy might find it easy to destroy his cans of carbolic acid during the hustle related to wedding. He tells Alu: “ Did you see Bhudeb Roy yesterday? Did you see how he looked at the

carbolic acid? He is planning something; I know him. We have to be careful, very careful. We have to watch him. There's nothing he won't do to get his hands on the carbolic" (122). He believes anything may happen to it and to protect it he wages a quixotic war with Bhudeb Roy who is actually fighting for his wife. Balaram converts his house into a fort and goes on patrolling around it with a squirt gun which is filled with carbolic acid. His fears go on increasing until it wipes out the whole family with the exception of Alu.

Aung San Suu Kyi makes an appearance in *The Glass Palace*. Dinu and Jaya go to see her as she addresses the crowd that has assembled before the house in which she is kept in confinement. Her head can be seen just above the gate, she has flowers in her hair, she is described as being beautiful beyond belief. When she talks to the people, she laughs lightening the atmosphere. This thin, slender figure has uncannily unsettled the military junta. She haunts them every moment, she unmasks them, all the while she is a very ordinary Burmese woman. Her strange methods of dealing with people leave the generals defenceless against her. Dinu says: "It's strange… I knew her father… I knew many others who were in politics… many men who are regarded as heroes now… but she is the only leader I've ever been able to believe in" (542).

The Hungry Tide is built on the unique and unfamiliar positioning of the tide country. The unpredictability of the tides and the lurking terror of the tigers which may pounce from anywhere put the reader on tenterhooks. The charm of the book is partly derived from this uncanny setting. When Nirmal and Nilima first reach the tide country the strangeness of the land shocks them. It resembled no place they had ever known. It was just ninety-seven kilometres from their homes and still it was

another world. Sundarbans in *The Hungry Tide* is described as an eerie place: "Visibility is short and the air is still and fetid. At no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrain's utter hostility to their presence, of its cunning and resourcefulness, of its determination to destroy or expel them" (8). Kanai is told of the peculiarity of the tide country in *The Hungry Tide*. His uncle tells him that every island in the 'bhatir desh' or tide country was inhabited at some point. But the hostility of the waters doesn't leave a trace of this occupation. "The speciality of mangroves is that they do not merely recolonize land: they erase time. Every generation creates its own population of ghosts" (54).

In the final narrative of Tridib's death May talks of it as a mystery. May tells the narrator that she used to think that it was she who killed him. As she matured, she came to understand that she was wrong. To think that she owed him his life was sheer arrogance, she says. Tridib must have known the moment he got out of the car that he would be killed. According to May, Tridib gave himself up, she thinks of it as an act of sacrifice and she acknowledges one's inability to understand the nature of his sacrifice; "…for any real sacrifice is a mystery" (252).

Death and other Strange Events

Freud writes of the uncanny that "many people experience the feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies" (628). As Poe says the most apt situation that evokes the beauty of fear is death. Death of a beautiful woman is the apotheosis of it. An uncanny event in *The Circle of Reason* is the death of Kulfi. She is described as a beautiful woman and Jyoti Das, the police officer is struck the moment he sees her. As Poe would say nothing could induce more horror than the death of a beautiful woman. She dies like a flower falls, very beautifully, elegantly,

startling even the reader who thought the narrator had let him/her into the secrets of the story. Kulfi dies when she is performing Tagore's *Chitrangada*. It's a dance drama and Kulfi plays the part of the titular heroine; she even wears a tiara. They are very symbolically playing the last scene and in between the dance Kulfi crashes to the floor and dies a very aesthetic death. Dr. Verma confirming her death utters that 'she's heavenly.' The beauty of the death adds to the uncanny effect of the scene. Manju of *The Glass Palace* also has a very aesthetic death. Manju kills herself by silently slipping into the swirling waters of Irawaddy as she is trying to cross the borders that run between Burma and India on a raft. She has been recently widowed and has a baby which demands her attention, an attention that she is never able to fully pay. She is depressed and can't go on further like that. She slides over from the raft into the dark, fast, numbingly cold river.

The dead do not completely leave the living ones in Ghosh's fiction. In *The Circle of Reason* Dr. Uma Verma is pushed on by the words and ideas of her dead father. Whenever she fails his expectations, he smiles melancholically from his picture. She does things to prove herself before him. She hurries always because her father had told her not to leave anything unfinished. She can even listen to his comments and advice even now. Balaram resurfaces as boils on the body of his nephew. Tridib even though dead isn't actually dead. He is living vicariously through his nephew who travels the paths he frequented, reads the atlas which was originally his, makes love to the woman who was originally his lover.

Another instance of the dead not taking a complete exit is in *The Glass Palace*. Dolly has quit the services of King Thebaw, has married Rajkumar and settled in Burma with their two children. One night when Dinu is ill Dolly dreams of

King Thebaw. She was dozing off sitting beside Dinu and "after some time had passed, someone spoke, in a voice that was well known to her: it was Thebaw. He was saying something to her with great urgency… she understood what he was trying to communicate" (203). Dolly tells Rajkumar that they needed to get to a hospital fast. Although cynical, Rajkumar takes them to the hospital. At the hospitals the doctors confirm that the child has polio. Dolly is also told that had they tarried they might as well have lost the child. It is at the hospital that Dolly gets to know that the night King Thebaw asked her to take her kid to the hospital he had already died. Again it is King Thebaw who initiates her in to her next phase of life which is filled with 'karuna'; a feeling which once discovered changes our concept of life itself.

There are references to summoning the spirits of the dead in Ghosh. *The Shadow Lines* refers to the invocation of the spirit of the astral body of Ivan, the Terrible by a member of the Theosophical Society. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is full of such instances of transfer of spirits and souls. In the ceremonies associated with transmigration the spirits of Lakhaan and Mangala are summoned.

Apart from all this there are several murders and murder attempts in Ghosh. Deeti of *Sea of Poppies* poisons her mother-in-law. Ah Fatt kills the First mate. Thousands are massacred in *The Hungry Tide*. Tridib is lynched in *The Shadow Lines* along with Jethamoshai and Khalil. Arjun kills Kishan Singh in *The Glass Palace*. *The Calcutta Chromosome* abounds in several macabre murders. The cult's insistence on secrecy and silence leads to many murders and murder attempts in the novel. Phulboni escapes death very narrowly in the Renupur station. Grigson who was too curious about the identity of Lakhaan escapes an attempt on his life and

flees from the place. He had found out that Lutchman was in fact Lakhaan coming from a very different place than he claimed. This infuriates Mangala and they try to finish him off. Another person who was curious about the activities of Mangala's group was Farley. Farley uses Dr. Cunningham's laboratory to further his study of the malaria virus. He understands that Mangala and her Lakhaan are consciously interfering with his work and trying to keep him in the dark. When he comes to know of the nature of Managala's healing processes Lakhaan lures him into Renupur station. Farley ends up as an anonymous dead body in the station. The readers put the puzzle together and understand it to be Farley's body (181). The cult mysteriously wipes out anyone who challenges their subterranean existence.

This briefly sums up the techniques Ghosh employs in his fiction to bring in the feeling of the uncanny/ unheimlich. Once more we look at the significance of the feeling. Bhabha discusses Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story* and Tony Morrison's *Beloved* and shows how both these writers make use of uncanny moments to talk about racial violence. He writes that the "study of world literature…must focus on those 'freak social and cultural displacements' that Morrison and Gordimer represent in their 'unhomely' fictions". Bhabha adds that "the critic must… take responsibility for the unspoken, unrepresented past that haunt the historical present" (12). An objective of the unhomely fiction is to foreground a past that has been historically relegated. It acquires a social responsibility this way by not being just about 'now-ness'.

Bhabha writes in *The Location of Culture* that art is "the fully realized presence of a haunting of history" (12). This haunting of history is very much a part of Ghosh's fiction and non-fiction. The uncanny aspect of haunting is evident in the

narration of Morichjhapi incident in *The Hungry Tide*. This is a story that has reached out to the translator Kanai through a gory massacre and several serendipities. *The Glass Palace* and *The Shadow Lines* are eerily shadowed by the histories of many partitions. *Sea of Poppies* talks about a shameful episode in India's uncatalogued history.

Pramod K Nayar describes the uncanny in his essay: "It is a perception of a space where the perceiver finds herself simultaneously "at home" and "not at home." The uncanny is the name of this experience of double perception of any space which is at once familiar and strange, safe and threatening, "mine" and "not mine." The "home" is a sensate condition, and the uncanny, being a matter of perception, is different for different people" (89). Nayar writes about *The Hungry Tide*:

> Bhabha's double movement of authority and non-sense, of the heimlich and the unheimlich in colonial contexts, is reproduced towards the end of HT. The double movement is one of knowledge, textuality and acculturation-a specific condition of the postcolonial uncanny that I term "the indigenous canny." This moves the "uncanny" beyond the realm of the merely psychic into cultural and geographical contexts, where dispossession-repossession, locational perceptions and epistemology inform the uncanny. (90)

Freud in his essay talks about how certain situations always evoke fear, like losing way and finding yourself at the same point every time, like having to see a number like '62' many times and thinking that it is some kind of message regarding one's lifespan. In Indian situations a white saree is associated with the uncanny. Indian Films often resort to it to introduce ghosts. In *The Circle of Reason* when one night Bhudeb Roy searches for his wife in bed he finds she is not there. The room

looks so creepy and nightmarish: “The room whistled with the jagged echoes of that distant wailing. Biting his knuckles, Bhudeb Roy crept to a window and shown his torch out. It fell on Parboti Debi in her white night time sari, stock still in the mango grove behind the house” (69). The situation is definitely eerie. Ghosh frequently makes use of such eerie situations.

Pramod K Nayar writes of how Ghosh’s uncanny even when using spectres is not limited to it (91). He writes that “Space, geography and topography are, in the tide country, central to the sense of the uncanny” (94). The uncanny is the space of an uncertainty and the moment of hesitation resulting partly from the confused narratives that generate both familiarity and strangeness (97). He talks about the politics in Ghosh’s uncanny.

> In *The Hungry Tide* the uncanny becomes the source of Ghosh's great politics of postcolonial dispossession, a politics that derives its strength from a spectropoetics. It marks a particular politics of homes, homelessness and at-home-ness and emerges as the rendering-ghostly of the dispossessed, in the "doubling" of land and water, but most of all in the theme of knowledge. As Kanai and Piya, the embodiments of a Westernized, metropolitan and technology-reliant culture, discover, it is not data or codified knowledge that ultimately renders the Sunderbans familiar, homely and secure (91)

Nayar writes about the uncanny nature of slime in his essay. He writes that the blurring of boundaries between imagination and reality, a point we discussed in the earlier chapter, itself is uncanny. “Like the uncanny that blurs the boundaries between imagination and reality … slime's very ambivalent texture - between land and water, both land and water- makes it uncanny” (93). Nayar writes that wetland is

always uncanny because it has no definite form. He quotes Ghosh's description of the land and comments how it all relates to the sense of the uncanny:

> It is clearly not a mappable land. The situation of intellectual uncertainty – hesitation-about the land is reinforced by numerous images and metaphors: "rumour,"'seductive word ""many layers of beguilement," all suggesting not only false/uncertain knowledge but also illusion and secrecy. Secrecy and uncertainty are, in Freud, integral to the uncanny …. Further, there is a sense of the primeval (the voice of the earth), a secret buried in the earth itself. (92)

Freud recounts the story of a young couple that he read in a magazine in his essay "The Uncanny." In the story the couple have moved to a new apartment. They notice a strangely modelled table there with carvings of crocodiles. Towards the evening they feel that there are crocodiles in the room; the couple can smell and even touch them. They stumble upon them. Freud cites this story to talk about the origin of the feeling of uncanny (26). Crocodiles feature in *The Hungry Tide* too. Pramod K Nayar refers to this connection. Piya's arm is almost amputated by a straying crocodile. When in Garjontola, Kanai moves towards the interior of the island because he thought tigers would be better killers than crocodiles. Crocodiles can move on land and water. Their amphibious existence frightens Kanai more than the territorial tiger.

Another method of producing an uncanny effect is by showcasing dismembered body parts. Freud writes in "The Uncanny": "Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist, feet which dance by themselves- all these have something peculiarly uncanny about them" (28). In *The Calcutta Chromosome* the sandbar where Zindi's boarding house is situated is known as 'Severed Head.'

Another reference to severed heads occurs in *The Glass Palace*. Uma when she returns to India after her many-year-long stay abroad looks at the papers only to be horrified by an image of sixteen decapitated heads lined up neatly on a table. The picture is accompanied by an article which says that the image is published to terrorise people who want to rebel against the British (253).

Bishnupriya Ghosh writes that *The Calcutta Chromosome* 'dramatizes ethical spectrology as a postcolonial imperative' (153). She also talks about how using the uncanny Ghosh critiques colonial truths and 'concomitant commodification of indigenous knowledge' (165). She writes of the virtual heterotopias of *The Calcutta Chromosome*:

> *The Calcutta Chromosome* specializes in temporal grafts. The description of the underground folk rituals through which *The Calcutta Chromosome* is transmitted from host to host deliberately evokes the magical proto-demonic rituals of early scientific alchemy with its reliance on the secret transformative properties of metals, as well as alternative tantric processes driven underground during the British Raj. The text's subtitle—"A Novel of Fevers, Delirium, and Discovery"—also self-consciously references two different historical periods similar in their radical expansions of territory, knowledge, and disease: the early modern age of fevered expansions, medical breakthroughs, and the scientific classification of other worlds, and the current times of globalization. Antar's delirious head rush is like the heady fever of imperialism, a precolonial expanding of worlds grafted onto an equally borderless twenty-first-century world of diasporic crossings and virtual heterotopias. (167)

Susan Bernstein in her article “It Walks: The Ambulatory Uncanny” writes how difficult it is to define the uncanny because this itself is a concept that is very helpless regarding keeping its boundaries intact:

> Uncanny is the word always falling away from itself into its opposite, yet affirming itself in doing so. The uncanny comes into being as a violation of the law of non-contradiction. Like a ghost, it “is” and “is not.” The opposition between subject and object also falls away with the erosion of the structure of identity; subject and predicate can no longer keep their boundaries intact. The uncanny is not a stable concept (subject) to which the predicate of a clear definition can be attached. (1113)

Literature especially fiction is more suitable for creating the feeling of the uncanny. Freud writes: “Fiction presents more opportunities for creating uncanny sensations than are possible in real life." Cixous writes: “...fiction can also multiply the uncanny effect by the interruption in the contract between author and reader, a "revolting" procedure in the author's estimation, which allows us to wander until the end, without any defense against the Unheimliche.” (547)

Derrida in *Spectres of Marx* writes why he has decided to talk about ghosts. He says he does that out of a sense of justice:

> If I am getting ready to speak at length about ghosts, inheritance, and generations, generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain others who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us, it is in the name of justice. Of justice where it is not yet, not yet there, where it is no longer, let us understand where it is no longer present, and where it will never be, no more than the law, reducible to laws or rights. It is necessary to

> speak of the ghost, indeed to the ghost and with it, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and just that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet there, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born. (xvii)

When Ghosh continually speaks of ghosts, he also does that because that is the very ethical thing that he can do. In the earlier chapter we have come across passages in which Ghosh talks about the necessity of being ethical. A writer should be ethical. He/ she has to speak of and for people who are not there. Sometimes these people are not taken into account like Mangala or Lakhaan in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, sometimes they are brutally obliterated like the refugees in *The Hungry Tide*, sometimes when he speaks of climatic changes, he is speaking for all those who are not yet born. Speaking about ghosts is speaking about people who are not privileged to be present in the present. It's a reminder of the past and the unborn future.

"Marx had his ghosts, we have ours, but memories no longer recognize such borders; by definition, they pass through walls, these revenants, day and night, they trick consciousness and skip generations" (Derrida, 36). So using ghosts is a way of recognizing no borders. It is easy when one is using them to trick time, trick the boundaries between the past and the present. The revenant has famously managed his/her 'going away' and 'coming home'. So being here and in the world of the dead, it confuses once again the notion of home.

Bhabha talks of the ubiquity of the feeling of unhomely in *The Location of Culture.* He says it becomes a strategy in literature when people are trying to

negotiate with the idea of cultural difference. He writes: "Although the 'unhomely' is a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites" (9). When the technique of uncanny is used even the most everyday places achieve a historical importance. It again gives rise to a blurring of boundaries, a topic discussed in detail in the previous chapter. Bhabha writes again: "The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (9).

The Shadow Lines speaks of the horror invoked in us once what was familiar to us suddenly turns out to be not so, the uneasy feeling when our city decides to turn against us. The distance between the familiar and the unfamiliar is a very short one and within a few strides every day occurrences traverse this distance quickly at times. Dhaka during riots proves to be very unhomely even to the children. The novel describes the feeling:

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

Loneliness is something that one feels when one is not home, when one is at

a place which could no longer be called home. According to the author this loneliness that is unhomely sets apart Indians from the rest of the world. They live in a locale which though familiar might at any point turn unfamiliar and hostile to them. In their dictionaries the meaning of the word home fluctuates between synonyms and antonyms. They inhabit a place which is neither familiar nor unfamiliar. They occupy the third space which is genuinely uncanny.

The end of *The Calcutta Chromosome* is the beginning of an interpersonal transference. Antar is sitting in his apartment in the U.S. and his supercomputer is offering him visuals of Calcutta. Antar is startled to learn that these visuals were uploaded the moment his supercomputer had stumbled upon the identity card of Murugan. In the visuals he sees an earlier scene with Sonali and Urmila substituted with Tara and Maria. When he tries to remove the head gear, he is restrained by Tara who assures him that he is not alone, all of them are with him. The novel ends with an uncanny clamour of voices: "There were voices everywhere now, in his room, in his head, in his ears, it was as though a crowd of people were in the room with him. They were saying: "We're with you; you are not alone; we will help you across" (262).

Dolly in *The Glass Palace* listens to multiple voices at night. This medley of voices is dealt with in the second chapter. When she is at the hospital with her unwell son Dinu, at midnight she finds herself 'listening to voices that were inaudible during the day' (210). This commixture of voices at midnight is a very uncanny thing. It is strangely unfamiliar, but these voices were present during the day, its only that they were inaudible, so they are familiar as well. They guide Dolly to her salvation in *The Glass Palace*. Listening to the voices in *The Calcutta Chromosome* Antar hopefully gets across.

Amitav Ghosh's works offer an unhegemonic site (as he tells Claire Chambers in an interview) where one listens to a multiplicity of voices. These voices speak in many tongues, they transcend the limitations of binary thinking, they do not adhere to the conventional categorisations, they are uncanny by being familiar as well as unfamiliar at the same time. These voices are telling the postcolonial Indian that he /she is not alone. They are telling him/her that they will help them get across. They are affirming a social solidarity that we all should feel. Bhabha writes in *The Location of Culture*:

> When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the displacements of memory and the indirections of art offer us the image of our psychic survival. To live in the 'unhomely' world, to find its ambivalences and ambiguities enacted in the house of fiction, or its sundering and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire for social solidarity. (18)

When Ghosh portrays the uncanny in his fiction it's because he understands that history hasn't accorded us untroubled visibility, its testimony has lost its grip on people. Unlike the author in "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi" and very much like the narrator's uncle Tridib in *The Shadow Lines* the author is asserting his social solidarity through his actions. By being a mix of the homely and the unhomely, the familiar and the unfamiliar, his fictional world points at the possibility of a space which is neither the one nor the other but a third space originating out of the two; a very hybrid space that juggles with the conventional boundaries, which lets you into its cultural melanges which are not mere colonial legacies , where you can clearly listen to the 'clamour of the voices' within and without, sans interruption.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

It is usually said of Ghosh that he opens many discussions and closes very few. He doesn't displace the orientalist assumptions by introducing a new universalism. His fictional world is far more complex to abide by the Manichean binaries. His fiction-scape abounds with a plethora of differences which nullify the essentialist ever-afters. This concluding chapter sums up what this thesis has been trying to say so far.

To begin with, Ghosh's fiction offers the reader a literal medley of voices. He incorporates many languages in his novels. Ghosh as a writer has always been fascinated by languages. His characters effortlessly move through many languages, some of them survive on their abilities as polyglots. Knowing many languages gives his characters an edge over others and not knowing more than one always straitjackets them into difficult situations. The manipulative powers of a polyglot are brought to light on many occasions. The key to survival in Ghosh's novels often is a mastery over many languages. This multilinguality is a forte of the subcontinent which has always been a hub where different travellers with different purposes met. Ghosh has reiterated in many interviews that his multilingualism is the multilingualism of the Indian Ocean.

Linguistic hybridity can be an indicator of creativity as well. People in diasporas can be highly inventive with regard to their medium of communication. Pidgins and creoles that offer hybridised varieties of languages are the offsprings of necessity and creativity. The variety of English that the English characters of *Sea of*

Poppies speak is an example of how the natives' language influences the coloniser's tongue. This variety though invented to assist the communication between the Whites and the natives has gone too much into the colonisers' heads that they resort to it even when speaking to one of their kind. Ghosh refers to languages coming into contact with each other as languages that enrich each other.

Ghosh usually engages in long etymological discussions of words which travel across multiple linguistic boundaries. There are lengthy discussions of the origins of various words which could be considered linguistic nomads. Ghosh suggests that modern lexicons which finally include these nomads refuse to acknowledge the ways through which these words have travelled. He represents these lexicons as products of linguistic hybridity.

For Ghosh this sort of linguistic hybridity is an inevitable one. Many of Ghosh's characters like Shombhu Debnath of *The Circle of Reason* or Murugan of *The Calcutta Chromosome* or the Burmese queen of *The Glass Palace* find that they express themselves effectively when they communicate in multiple languages. Heteroglossia is an ordinarily Indian thing. It has its roots in ancient trade routes and travel histories. It is some sort of a pre-colonial legacy. That their cultures had these phases in them and that their history is not something that began with the history of colonialism are things that postcolonial writers should remind their readers of everytime.

Chantal Zabus in his essay "Reflexification" has talked about a third register that the postcolonial writer makes use of. This third register, very much similar to Bhabha's idea of the third space, is an unfamiliar language that mixes the European and indigeneous languages. Ghosh's novels speak in this third register. He mixes

English with various other languages like Bengali, Hindi, Arabic, Bhojpuri, Burmese, Hindustani, Chinese, Cantonese, Malayalam, English, Chinese Pidgin English, Laskari and Judeo –Arabic. His third register stands witness to the millenia-old commercial, linguistic and pragmatic hybridity of the subcontinent.

Ghosh's writing is filled with hybrid spaces where his characters manifest themselves to the fullest. For a human being to come to terms with the complexities and multiplicities in one's own self a fair amount of room is needed. Ghosh offers these hybrid spaces in his novels. These are the in-between -spaces that Bhabha often talks about. These interstices are venues of creative interventions as well. Dinu's house-cum-studio Glass Palace in the novel *The Glass Palace* is a typical example. It is Dinu's personal space which at times becomes public. Its name reminds one of the Burmese monarchs' palace, the titular Glass Palace that was made of glass ceilings. But this is where the laymen assemble to register their protest against the authorities and those who wield power. On a personal level this studio offers the author a chance to do something that he has been unable to do in his real life. In essays like “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi” Ghosh has written how hesitant he was to join movements and walk around chanting slogans. Even though he felt the need to speak against the silencing hands of power he was always the reluctant artist. But in the novel there is this ardent activist who leads a camouflaged protest movement. The studio offers him with a venue for creative intervention. It is at the same time public and private, personal and political, royal and plebeian. In short it is the creative Third Space. Ghosh's novels carry several such spaces.

Ghosh identifies the threat of homogeneity. The Imam of *In an Antique Land* comes out of this understanding. The Imam is an Egyptian and the book begins

with a description of how the West scrambled for the knowledge that was Eastern, namely Egyptian. Their quests ended up in the libraries and genizas of Egypt and they travelled back to their homelands with the loot. After describing this Egyptomania the book talks about the Egyptians who believe that they are living as an obsolete civilization. They are people who are travelling in the West, who thirst for the homogenising Western narratives. The Imam who used to follow a medical tradition that comprised herbs and leaves is apathetic towards discussing it with anybody. He has adopted the tools of modern medicine and carries a box of syringe and medicines even though people don't trust him with it. These homogenising narratives are to be resisted. They scare the author like the orderly monochromatic rubber plantations in Malaya scare Dolly in *The Glass Palace.*

People in Ghosh's accounts are always people on the move, they have been so for centuries. Since travelling is a motif in Ghosh, his fiction is replete with cosmopolitan elements. In novels like *In an Antique Land* there is a romantic vision of pre-colonial cosmopolitanism. His al-Ghazira, Calcutta, New York, Nashawy and Lataifa in Egypt and even the remote Tide Country in the Sundarbans are places buzzling with tokens of their cultural hybridity.

Ghosh's characters span a wide range; there are royals among them, there are laymen, there are men, women and the in-between, there are members of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as well. The complexity of human beings never lets the writer homogenise his characters. Ghosh talks about the adaptable human beings like Uma of *The Circle of Reason,* unscrutable people like Fokir in The Hungry Tide, fluid people like Paulette or Deeti in *Sea of Poppies* and vicarious people like the narrator in *The Shadow Lines* who live the lives of others. Ghosh also talks about

a variety of mimic men; some of them are doomed to perish and some are skilful practitioners of mimicry. The skilled practitioners like Neel could be seen using it to subvert the power structure.

Ghosh's verandas, flat roofs, his tide country which is simultaneously land and water, his ships, Shombhu's trees, Deeti's shrine; all these are hybrid spaces which favour differences without imposing hierarchies. Bhabha writes in *The Location of Culture* about how engaging with cultural differences fragments our habit of thinking in binaries (3). Through his fiction Ghosh makes maps of the multiple points that exist between the extremes of solitude and market. His businessmen, like Ben Yiju of *In an Antique Land* are poets whose letters speak of business and poetry.

Ghosh's fiction speaks of cultures that are neither unique nor distinctly discrete. The moment man began to travel cultures had lost their insularity. Through his books Ghosh dismantles the myth of insular places. But all the while he is mindful that stories of syncretism are unpalatable to the paranoiac modern world which firmly believes in the myths of insularity. Ghosh presents his syncretism or the hybridity of cultures not as a universalising technique. Because he is mindful of the cultural differences, he doesn't camouflage disparities as sameness. The process of hybridisation is a process of reorganisation.

Ghosh talks about science when he is actually talking about counter-science, he talks about riots when he is actually speaking about people's resistance to it, he talks about silence when he is actually uncovering all those archives which nullify the overarching silences in the projected histories. Robert Dixon in "Travelling in the West: The Writing of Amitav Ghosh" writes how the writing of Ghosh by being

too nuanced defies the usual facile dichotomies (15). Ghosh preference of the number three must have come through his engagements with cultural differences which messes up the habit of thinking in binaries. The third space allows other positions to emerge. The interstitial spaces of coexistence give his novels their charm and vividness.

The third space according to Bhabha is the place where boundaries get destabilized. (1990, 247). Ghosh's fiction destabilizes several boundaries. Blurring of lines that distinguish and demarcate is a typical Ghoshean literary trait. Ghosh erases the boundaries between languages. Similarly wiped out are certain other boundaries like the ones between fact and fiction, dreams and reality, past, present and future, margins and centre, life and death. Ghosh endorses such a syncretism that effaces these imagined-into-existence borders which are naturally thickened with the passage of time. In his novels Ghosh collapses time in many of his books rupturing the readers over-familiarity with the notion of linear time. His symbols transgress their usual realms and become totally something else. Life in the margins and peripheries always interests him, his centres may not always hold and his margins may not always be real margins. In works like *The Calcutta Chromosome* everything happens in the margin and the centre is mute witness or unknowing contributor to what happens in the fringes.

Ghosh intersperses his fiction with facts in such a manner that to distinguish where one ends and where the other begins is a task that is synonymous with the impossible. His reality is a projection of the imagination. For him stories are there to live in and there are many characters in his fiction who actually live in stories and are kept alive by stories. In novels like *The Shadow Lines* imagination is a very

factually concrete thing, in *The Glass Palace* people like Jaya are fed on stories, characters like Nirmal in *The Hungry Tide* unflinchingly cling to their own narratives. After all, in the end everyone transforms into a story.

In Ghosh there are spirits that cross over from their realms to arrest the bulldozers of development. Often miracles in his fiction have the most quotidian origins. The boundaries between the magical and the mundane are so slippery to unsettle the notions regarding everyday realities. Misbegotten plans become customs, love often becomes lovelessness, not hatred and land oscillates between itself and water.

Ghosh has often pointed out in interviews why he reckons that novel is the most complete means of human expression. Compartmentalising things into mutually exclusive criteria is not a practise of this writer. Novel incorporates multiple aspects of human existence; it helps the author synthesize things. It can talk of anything like fishing, or cookery or love or history or spirituality. All rigid classifications are there to blind us to the possibilities of life. So itself he blurs the boundaries between what are commonly accepted as different things. It is in these blurred boundaries between land and water, facts and fantasy, centres and margins, past, present and future that the third space begins its presencing.

To concretise the idea of the third space that accommodates hybridity, Ghosh's fiction makes use of the concept of the uncanny. Using the strange and the uncanny is Ghosh’s technique to highlight the interstitial realities of the third space which is neither familiar or unfamiliar, but is a combination of both. The uncanny or the unheimlich according to the etymological discussion of Freud is something that is heimlich and unheimlich at the same time. It, in other words, refers to those

things that are homely and unhomely simultaneously. The concept of the uncanny is one that points to a wiping out of the lines between several binaries. It is at the same time strange and familiar, it is intimate and yet foreign, it is neither of the exterior or of the interior. It better explains the third space of Bhabha.

Ghosh's literary oeuvre is replete with the dilemmas of home and outside. From the debut novel *The Circle of Reason* itself Ghosh has entered into the discussions of what is homely and unhomely. The very much home-bound Jyoti Das of the novel decides to journey in to the foreign lands at the end of the novel. Similarly, Alu who ran into the blazing home because he couldn't bear the thought of the ending of the known world also decides to settle abroad. These discussions continue throughout in his novels and the second novel revolves on the ambiguity of going away and coming home. The pre requisite of centrality that makes these terms meaningful is unavailable in Ghosh's fiction-scape. The hybrid spaces which are homely as well as unhomely are organised in such a manner that they make possible the voicing of concerns that are not monitored by the demands of binary thinking.

According to Ghosh, for people in a geopolitical area like the Indian subcontinent the distance between familiar and unfamiliar is a very short one which could be traversed in no time. Many of his characters go through the horrors of their homelands turning against themselves.They live in a locale that might at any point turn unfamiliar and hostile to them. For them the word 'home' is a compilation of its synonyms and antonyms. They inhabit a third space which is truly uncanny.

To make his fiction-scapes familiar as well as unfamiliar Ghosh brings in a number of uncanny elements. Presentiments and premonitions lead his characters, their nightmares are those that transform into reality midway the dream. Doubling

which is often represented as a technique that effectively produces the feeling of the uncanny also is deployed frequently in the novels. Spectres are a usual sight in a novel of Ghosh. There are uncanny silences and deathly secrets in Ghosh. The dead in these novels do not really leave the living ones, they stick around as books, stories, words, boils or sometimes as real ghosts. There are many spirit-summonings, murder attempts and murders, reincarnations and rebirths in his novels. Together they drive home the point that what the reader experiences is not what he could normally categorise as familiar or unfamiliar. This is the experience of the third space.

The last two novels of the Ibis trilogy, *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2015) though not part of this study offer various instances that support almost all the claims that this thesis makes. They offer some more languages to be included in to the already resounding medley of tongues in Ghosh's oeuvre. Both of them have Malay, Chinese, Hindi, English and multiple pidgins and creoles as part of their lexicons. The Laskari with which the readers were acquainted when they read *Sea of Poppies* features prominently in these novels and Neel's fascination with language formulates itself into the setting up of a dictionary in *Flood of Fire*. The French-English patois that Deeti speaks during the opening of *River of Smoke* is a creole which is a mix of some other languages like Bhojpuri and Hindi as well.

Deeti's shrine, one of the hybrid spaces in *Sea of Poppies* is developed into a real temple in *River of Smoke*. Its position itself is particular because it is situated neither on flat land nor on water. It is on top of a mountain, precisely on a cliff that hangs precipitously over the sea. This shrine, with a puja room and accompaniments

is also the book of Colvers' history for its walls contain the pictures of everybody that has helped set up their family.

Baboo Nob Kissin again confuses the margins between the centre and margins as he is the one who assists and mentors Zachary's transformation into a street-smart and cunning opium merchant. He makes things happen, helps in the reunion of Neel's family and restores the bond between Zachary and Paulette. Several opium induced dreams cross their realms and grow real enough to even annihilate characters.

Bahram Modi is filled with premonitions and nightmares as he journeys to Canton with a shipload of opium in Anahita. Apart from these the uncanny makes itself felt through amputations like those of Kesri Singh's, many suicides like those of Bahram Modi's and Mrs. Burnham's, murders like Ah Fatt's and Chi Mei's and to top it all through the concrete materialization of ghosts. Bahram's ghost is almost like a character in *Flood of Fire*, and in *River of Smoke* it is the ghost of Chi Mei that beckons Bahram to take the plunge and kill himself in an opium-induced dream.

Both these novels do substantiate the arguments of this thesis and the Trilogy itself demands a full-length study with respect to its portrayal of hybridity and third space. Moreover, Ghosh is going to be remembered primarily as the author of the Trilogy. The present researcher was forced to give up the last two books in the Trilogy because that would have made this thesis too long and the insufficiency of time would have made her unable to pay the attention they require. So this thesis concerns itself with the first seven novels that were published at the time of the commencement of this study.

Ghosh doesn't expose the vulgarity of dualism by simply reversing it. He doesn't create false polarities; instead he searches for another ground where coexistence is possible. He understands that the sustaining discourses of his land engage with pluralities and not essentialism. His fiction accommodates these pluralities and this thesis has been an attempt to find out how he does this.

Towards the end of *The Glass Palace* Jaya and Dinu go to listen to Aung san Suu Kyi in an oddly assembled Skoda car. Jaya looks at its different coloured doors and wonders about its strangeness. Dinu replies:" Yes...this is a car that has been put together entirely from bits of other cars...The bonnet is from an old Japanese Ohta...one of the doors is from a Volga...It's miracle that it runs at all..." (540). But these are everyday miracles and we ourselves and the air that surrounds us are very much like this car. We are the everyday miracles that run. Our hybridity, be it linguistic, be it cultural, is an inevitability that results from an ancient to modern cultural change and exchange. Ghosh in his fiction tries to reintroduce 'the culture of accommodations' that we lost after the gory encounters with colonialism. This is the loss that he laments in novels like *In an Antique Land*. By incorporating the third space which with its medley of tongues throws to the wind categorisations by being familiar as well as unfamiliar, homely as well as unhomely, Ghosh is affirming his social solidarity which calls for inclusions and cultures of accommodation.

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