EXAMINING SUBALTERN AGENCY IN AMITAV GHOSH'S NOVELS

Ph.D. THESIS

by

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INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ROORKEE
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A THESIS

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of

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CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the work which is being presented in the thesis entitled **"EXAMINING SUBALTERN AGENCY IN AMITAV GHOSH'S NOVELS"** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy and submitted in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee, is an authentic record of my own work carried out during a period from July, 2013 to December, 2017 under the supervision of Dr. Rashmi Gaur, Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee.

The matter presented in the thesis has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other Institute.

(SUKANYA MONDAL)

This is to certify that the above statement made by the candidate is correct to the best of my knowledge.

(Rashmi Gaur)
Supervisor

Dated:

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation explains who the subalterns are, in detail, and the legitimacy of the nomenclature is problematized as well. The subalterns are the non-elite mass of South Asia whose voice remained unheard in the written history of the land. The subaltern scholarship came as a reaction to the Cambridge school of interpretation of India's colonial history in 1982. Against this pedagogical background of South Asian history, in my dissertation I have tried to examine the following objectives: (i) Ghosh's credibility of registering the agency of the subaltern, (ii) Inspection of the binaries in all of his writing e.g. science-pseudo science, tradition- progress, colonialism-nationalism-cosmopolitanism, etc. and (iii) Problematizing the production and distribution of knowledge. Besides explaining objectives and methodology, in the first chapter, I have given a brief biographical note on Amitav Ghsoh and the scheme of next chapters of the thesis.

The second chapter tries to analyse how Ghosh presents the relation between the poles of various binaries how these binaries are put along the elite-subaltern divide. I have taken up *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome* in this chapter. In the first section, I argue that while portraying these relations Ghosh shows that the ideas which are generally perceived to be opposite to each other, in reality are not so much antithetical. Science and pseudo-science or religious rituals is the most prominent binary in *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*. In both of these novels, Ghosh hints at certain binaries but resists the formations of such binaries in order to refute the long-standing European claim on modernity. Here my argument theoretically hinges on Dipesh Chakrabarty's critique of European modernity in *Provincializing Europe.*

Chapter III has discussed the problems in the representation of the subaltern in literature and media and the issue of subaltern agency against the background of national politics. In the pre-Partition condition, Ghosh shows that the subalterns were not represented at all. As the question of nation and freedom were at the centre of contemporary politics, the opinions of the poor and unprivileged who were marginal everywhere irrespective of their religious faiths, were never considered. Against the backdrop of nationalist politics, Ghosh makes a comparison between personal history and state-documented history. In the two novels *The Shadow Lines* and *The Hungry Tide* which I have taken up in this chapter, Ghosh addresses these issues.

Chapter IV discusses the commodification of labour and the intrusion of capitalism into Indian society in the context of *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*. In these two novels, Ghosh draws a detailed picture of how opium enslaves the entire social system of India. Ghosh actually tries to draw different facets of the history of opium trade and the Opium Wars. I have discussed how Ghosh through the portrayal of subaltern characters compels the readers to see many things which are not mentioned in the documented history of opium trade and Opium Wars. We see in these two novels, that the labour force, whether they are the farmers or the workers in the opium factories, are monetarily dependent on opium, and in their leisure hours they use it as a drug. In the *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh depicts the plight of the peasants who are doubly exploited. For compulsive farming of poppies, they go bankrupt monetarily and then it leads them to choose indentureship in faraway islands. Ghosh also shows how colonialism facilitates the inroads of capitalism into Indian society. The text of these two novels are actually the most acerbic critiques of colonialism produced so far by Ghosh.

Chapter V delineates the issue of the schism in the Indian people's psyche irrespective of their social and economic position during the colonial regime. For this study I have taken up *The Glass Palace* and *Flood of Fire*. Ghosh describes in these two novels how both the elite and the subaltern Indians find themselves in a situation of being participants in the colonizing process and this realization has permanently planted a dilemma in their minds. Through his portrayals of various characters e.g. the Collector and Arjun in *The Glass Palace* and Neelrattan Haldar and Kesri Singh in the *Flood of Fire*, Ghosh gives a detailed nature of the dilemma of colonized Indians. What is interesting in particularly these two novels is that the characters come from various social and economic spheres of society, but no one could avoid the schismatic effect of colonialism.

Thus from the entire fictional oeuvre of Amitav Ghosh, I have found that Ghosh has peopled his novels with characters from all parts of society. In the initial stage of this research, I have had a reservation myself which actually formed one of my research questions: credibility of Amitav Ghosh in registering the agency of the subaltern because of his socio-economic standing. In this study, I have found and realized that one does not have to portray *only* marginal characters in order to depict their marginality. Ghosh does not confine himself in depicting the details of the socio-economically less privileged people, but at times with the details of the well-to-do people's lives

and specially the social transactions between people of different stations, the marginality or the stakes of the marginal becomes manifest in his texts.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis attempts to study a particular part of Amitav Ghosh's writing. References to different historiographies in case of India will surface repeatedly throughout as I argue that Ghosh challenges the very basic pre-condition of these historiographies—nation. The concept of nation does come up in his writings, but he focuses on those unnamed multitude who form a nation yet, who rarely have any say when countries are born or partitioned. Walter Benjamin's observation on the passing on of inheritance between rulers is congruous to refer to here. Benjamin affirms that because of this inheritance, rulers always empathize with the victors only. Therefore, the people who are "trampled down" or the losers are not documented or not authentically represented in history. Thus a historical materialist's duty is to read history or write history against the grain because history is a narrative of domination. History is such a discipline in which knowledge is negotiated and invariably the history of domination and rulers passes on as history of nation in general. But in case of India, the idea of nation within the documented history is not very cohesive according to the Western definition. In fact, nation is quite a modern subject. Eric Hobsbawm raises the issue of how defining a nation could be a difficult task because of the numerous ideological-historical transitions it has gone through. (10) Ernest Gellner describes nationalist ideology to be informed with "false consciousness". He writes: "Its myths invert reality: it claims to defend folk culture while in fact it is forging a high culture; it claims to protect an old folk society while in fact helping to build up an anonymous mass society." (Gellner, 2008: 120) He also explains that history as a discipline is mishandled in the discourse of nationalist ideology.

Ranajit Guha argues that in Western historiography specially the one advocated by Hegel, state is always the natural arbitrator. And as in case of Asia and Africa, the concept of state was not there as it was there in the west, peoples of these places were labelled as peoples without history. (Guha, *History at the Limits of World History*) Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that the very idea of nation was a borrowed one, and in the context of Colonized British India—it was a very European idea which the nationalist Indians subscribed in order to streamline an anticolonial agenda—but in order to put themselves in the subject position, they put the family, or to be more precise the patriarchal extended family as a metaphor of nation in small scale. And because of the

sporadic endeavours of individual scholars and historians, one can see possibilities "to liberate history from the metanarrative of nation state." At the same time, Chakrabarty also asserts that in spite of the fetish of nation in Western history, the historians' understanding of history (in the European vein) all over the world, working with "non-European archives opens up the possibility of a politics and project of alliance between the dominant metropolitan histories and the subaltern peripheral pasts." ("Who Speaks for Indian Past?" 17-20) Contradicting this vein of recent history writing, Frederick Jameson claims all texts written in the postcolonial era in the third world countries to be necessarily nationalist. (65-88)

Everywhere historiography is largely the history of the elite—the coronation of kings, wars fought between different states, victory and loss in battles etc. The life of the common people goes almost unmentioned. The Subaltern theorists, spearheaded by Ranajit Guha started to voice the necessity of a different historiography for South Asia in early 1980s. Till that time, the two dominant ideological stands in the field of South Asian history were the Cambridge School and the Nationalist historians. The Cambridge School of historians interpret or write the emergence of India as a nation state at the time of British colonialism from an imperialist point of view. They observe that India, for centuries, were divided into many princely states and the regents were often engaged in battles among them. Because of the centralization of British administration, a sense of nationalism took shape in India. Anil Seal, one of the Cambridge scholars describes Indian National Congress as "a ramshackle set of local linkages…an annual tamasha."(Seal, 290) In short, India, to be more precise, Indians, were divided by their varied interests according to their respective locality, community, province, class and caste. The similarities and conflicts of interests somehow made these multiple layers of the whole set-up interconnected. He asserts that there was always a fierce competition among these different layers and groups for colonial favour: "In every province, at every level and inside every category, political associations were formed as the expression of claim and counter-claim, of group and counter-group, of competitors vying for the favours of the Raj."(Seal, 351) Besides Seal, David Washbrook, Richard Gordon, Gordon Johnson are a few from this school.

Besides the Cambridge School, there emerged another school of historians quite like a reaction to the former one's thesis on Indian national politics, who tried to give Indian politics a unified national anticolonial interpretation. Nationalist historians, the chief of the group being

Bipan Chandra studies Indian history not from the point of view of neither the Imperialists nor the elite political leaders, but as a dynamics of multiple economic classes and castes and communities of India. They primarily focused on the impact of colonialism on Indian economy and described the anticolonial movement as a result of the realization of the mass as well as indigenous political leaders of the misery brought in by colonialism. These historians are called radical nationalists. Bipan Chandra, Romila Thapar, K.M. Panikkar, Mridula Mukherjee are noted scholars of this school.

Next came the Subaltern Studies group of historians and social scientists. They tried to capture an ideologically holistic picture of colonialism and anti-colonial movement. While the Cambridge School found no difference between imperialism and nationalism in case of India, the radical nationalists portrayed the elite nationalist leaders as unquestionably ideal personalities. The Subaltern Studies scholars sought to capture the voice of the common and marginal people in Indian history. Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gautam Bhadra, Sumit Sarkar, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, David Arnold, Rosalind O'Hanlon, Gyan Pandey, Shahid Amin are some from this school.

Therefore, these are the primary three types of historiographies which give written Indian history its theoretical and ideological scaffolding. What is common in all these three types of historiography is that in each case, the nation is the primary factor or entity on which a history builds up. The Subaltern Studies scholars' endeavour is unique in its emphasis on locating the "mass character" of anticolonial movement. (Mondal, 48) Although the Subaltern Studies scholars claim to study the riff-raff of South Asia, Anshuman A. Mondal finds some of them to be ideologically too lop-sided. He specially criticizes Partha Chatterjee's use of "Home and the World" dichotomy to explain the colonized-colonizer relationship "at the expense of other social relationship." (49) Sumit Sarkar observes that the general notion that availability of Western education facilitates the removal of so called South Asian features of social relations like casteism and such other traditions was wrong. Western education did not always make the intelligentsia westernized, nor could it always make an intrusion into the precolonial shell of South Asian traditions, rather sometimes the cultural sphere was made more fortified as a reaction to the effects of colonialism. (Sarkar, *Modern India*) At large, in the Subaltern Studies critique of nationalism, modernity is read as an effect brought in as a result of Western education to Indian society.

Relevance of Amitav Ghosh's writing in this historiographical debate

Amitav Ghosh challenges the very tools which have been used for writing and studying history and the chief question he raises in this pedagogical challenge is against the European hegemony on modernity. Modernity is regarded as a cornerstone of Enlightenment. Ghosh in his writing disrupts the utopian model of modernity which is flaunted by Modernist intellectuals. In his email conversation with Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ghosh explains that the tendency to ascribe the reformist surge of the 19th century colonial India to the Enlightenment ideals is wrong as there was an effort even in the Mughal era to stop the rite of Sati. He also makes a distinction between racism practised by white Europeans in Africa or Americas and casteism and communalism practised by indigenous South Asians. He further goes on to analyze that it is not the Enlightenment ideals which dispel the evils in these practices but in case of racism, it is in the core of Enlightenment which legitimize discrimination. Ghosh points out that the internal logic between racism and casteism or communalism is very much different though the effect is almost same.

Thus, we can see that following this path, working with non-European archives with the understanding of European history, Ghosh peoples his novels with those characters who were trampled down by history. The characters of his novels so far are very common yet varied in their thoughts and yet they are so similar across the border that it questions the validity of drawing any border at all. My thesis is theoretically located within this discursive field of Subaltern Studies. And I have chosen Amitav Ghosh's fictional oeuvre as the major text of my work. Specifically, I would examine agency of the subaltern in Amitav Ghosh's novels.

Both "subaltern" and "agency" are two very loaded terms in the context of literary criticism. In fact, at times these two words may appear as a binary of two mutually exclusive concepts. The word "subaltern" was first used by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*. What exactly he wanted to mean or whether he used it as a code word to avoid the censorship of the then fascist government of Italy is still an issue of debate. The majority of scholars think that Gramsci used "subaltern" in order to mean the proletariat, following the Subaltern Studies scholars' allusion to the censorship thesis. Scholars like David Arnold and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describe Gramsci's use of "subaltern" as a euphemism. But a few people dissent from the majority pointing at Gramsci's use of the word "proletariat" in *Prison Notebooks*. Now though Gramsci indeed denoted the people of the lower rung of Italian society, his understanding of subalternity and

subalternity as defined by Ranajit Guha differ. Guha demonstrates: "The word "subaltern" in the title stands for the meaning as given in Concise Oxford Dictionary, that is "of inferior rank", and the term is used 'as a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender, and office or in any other way." Agency or human agency means a person's control over his/her own choice.

In the thesis, I will explain who the subalterns are, in detail, and I shall problematize the legitimacy of the nomenclature. The subalterns are the non-elite mass of South Asia whose voice remained unheard in the written history of this land. The subaltern studies scholars claimed that the history of India written so far was partial as the point of view had always been that of the colonizers. Even Indian origin historians too, they claimed, could not come out of that colonizer's gaze. The subaltern studies scholars intervened at this point. The Indian history the documentation of which had started with the patronage of people like Warren Hastings or William Jones, can be read as a site of "epistemic violence". The phrase "epistemic violence" was first used by Michel Foucault. Later it was given a new dimension by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. According to Spivak , "epistemic violence" is the ruining of a system of knowledge of colonized people by Western (colonial) system. T. B. Macaulay's famous Minute on education in India (1835) can be cited as a case in point here.

Now my proposition is to examine the subaltern agency in Amitav Ghosh's writing. The backdrop of his writing (novels cover a wide range of time –from the colonial time of early 19th century to Postcolonial, post-partition time of 1980s. That Ghosh is considered an author who writes for the subaltern agency is evident in the fact that his essay "The Slave of MS. H.6" was published in one of the issues of the Subaltern Studies journal. In an essay titled "Diasporic Predicament", Ghosh himself declares: "… 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."

A brief note on Amitav Ghosh

Amitav Ghosh did his D.Phil in Social Anthropology. He writes fictions and non-fictions in English. He has taught in many universities e.g. Delhi University, Queens College, American

University of Cairo, Columbia, and Harvard University. In spite of the vast range of subjects of his writing—migration, national-political border, indentureship, opium trade, botany etc. he cannot be aligned with any particular group of thinkers or writers, for example, the subaltern scholars, or the Marxists, or the Post-structuralists, or the essential humanists. The works of Amitav Ghosh which I have selected for my study are *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1991), *The Glass Palace* (2001), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2015). At this point, the first challenge is to ascertain Amitav Ghosh's authority to have registered the agency of the subaltern because he writes in English. After all, English is not the language of the subaltern in India.

Problematising the medium of Ghosh's writing

In this context, it can be cited here that Tabish Khair makes a poignant comment in his dedicatory message of the book *Babu Fiction: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels*, "…to family servants, village relatives and those friends …who could not read Indian English fiction but Indian English fiction often claims to have read:..." Precisely, in a sizeable section of Indian English fiction, the lives of these people who are not well-versed in English and therefore, cannot read English fictions, are described; "… we are left with the problem of accounting for and registering the agency of the Coolie in a language (English) that is seldom, if ever, employed by the Coolie (and never from choice in an ordinary situation). (Khair, 303) Tuomas Huttunen maintains that the way in which Ghosh describes the condition of the lower class (subaltern people in a language e.g. English which they do not know is an act of appropriation. Albeit it is true that they sometimes are the narrators in his novels. Thus comes up the question how much agency these dispossessed people (who do not even have the command over this particular language) would have in the narrative.

In fact when it comes to the issue of the use of a particular language, Ghosh himself has certain reservations against the recognition of Anglophone literature. In 2001, Ghosh withdrew his novel *The Glass Palace* from the competition of "Commonwealth Writers' Prize" on the ground that the organizers, by nominating only the books written in English, undermined the literature written in other various languages which once were considered to be part of the British Empire. Discussing his views about the motivating policy of the "Commonwealth Writers' Prize," Graham

Huggan observes that the sole objective of the contest is to capture the multicultural essence of the erstwhile empire, and specially the critical retrospection of the empire. (2001) He further observes that instead of taking up all the non-Anglophone literatures along with texts written in English in their purview, such contests focus only on the Anglophone writers from the commonwealth nations. Neil Lazarus elucidates this tendency thus:

> The field of postcolonial studies is structured in such a way that it is much more likely to register the presence of writing in English and, to a lesser extent, French or Spanish, than writing in such other languages as Chinese, Arabic, Yoruba, Zulu, Amharic, Malay, Urdu, Telegu, Bengali, Sinhala, Tagalog, or even in the metropolitan and formerly colonial languages of Dutch and Portuguese. Similarly, it is much more likely to register the presence of writers who adopt the generic and modal conventions readily assimilable by Euro-American readers than of writers who root their work in other conventions. (Lazarus 2004: 428)

And again Ghosh himself clarifies in an interview that because of cultural and linguistic encounters during British colonialism in India and specifically in Bengal, there is no such thing called pure or uncontaminated Bengali:

> …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. (Sankaran, 7)

The position of English has always been special both in colonial and postcolonial India fraught with numerous battles between languages. The politicization of any language has always determined its status in the social sphere in South Asia. One of the primary impediment British traders of the East India Company initially found themselves with was their incompetence in Indian languages. Persian, being the chief functioning language of the Court as well as one of the scholarly languages in Mughal India, traders were not sure about the interpretation of their tracts by the Indian side. Bernard Cohn, in his phenomenal essay, “The Command of Language and the Language of Command” mentions those Indian scribes, translators, scholars, informants who as salaried workers of the British East India Company built the huge archive of knowledge about

India. Thus Cohn observes, "The conquest of India (by the British) was a conquest of knowledge." (16) The trajectory of knowledge building in India by British administration shows the shifting status of different languages of India. English, with the increasing importance of British merchants and then their military prowess and administrative roles gradually replaced Persian and became the chief functioning language of administration of the Raj in India. This new tide of English learning helped flourish the colonial education system. But Cohn argues that although the contribution of Indian scribes, pundits, translators and clerks had immense historical importance, their task ended at writing only. The European scholars always interpreted those texts. Therefore, at that time, it was rather a knowledge bank about India and not a knowledge bank of India. Hermeneutically, these piles of documents were based on Western reference-frame. Thus, Indian clerks or pundits did not have much agency in the later interpretation of the tracts or documents they were meant to translate. Translation and interpretation seem to have a big perspectival and hermeneutic gap. William Carey advised the learning of the local tongue (in this case Bengali) necessary for British administrators as a direct contact between administrators and local folks was very important. More importantly, Carey cites that the knowledge of the local tongue would lessen the administrators' dependency on translators. Yet, it can be said that the British conquest of India came not only through Indian sepoys employed by the East India Company or later the British Government, but those Indian scribes who documented, charted, translated, and when asked, gave suggestions to their British masters for administrative and mercantile success in India. They had a role in how or what happened in history, but documented history as such do not acknowledge them by their names.

Ghosh's specialty is at this very thematic juncture. Ghosh tries to build a narrative of those who never were in the limelight of history. Not that he completely shies away from the grand narrative of history, but this grand narrative with all its amplified eloquence is not the only voice. He captures the other voices which are not so much articulate and set them beside the eloquent history. Invariably, in all his novels, the backdrop is a (or more than one) historically famous event(s), but the characters are those who never got a mention in documented history. Thus there are characters like Lutchman (a native informant working as an assistant in Ronald Ross's laboratory), Kesri (a subaltern in East India Company army) Babu Nobkissin (a gomustah working for Mr. Burnham, an influential opium merchant) etc. peopling Ghosh's novels. Binayak Roy in his paper "Exploring the Orient from Within: Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke"* argues that

Ghosh by putting the subaltern as a character in his writing creates a process which not only recognizes the subaltern's existence (unlike the historian) but gives him an agency.

Problem of representation of the subalterns

My argument in this matter is whether the process of recognizing the existence of the subaltern would also facilitate the process of equipping the subaltern with agency. By focusing on the socially/politically/sometimes economically marginal characters, by depicting the hardships and nitty-gritties of their every-day lives, Ghosh embeds personal/individual histories in the grand narrative of history. By doing this, he also problematizes history as a discipline. Shahid Amin's realization of this same sentiment is worth-citing in this context:

> When writing histories of the unlettered—workers or peasants who produce goods and services, not documents—it is now conventional to latch on to extraordinary events in the lives of such people. Peasants do not write, they are written about. The speech of humble folk is not normally recorded for posterity, it is wrenched from them in courtrooms and inquisitorial trials." (Shahid Amin, xviii)

In his book *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India,* Ranajit Guha also asserts the historiographic lacuna in the subaltern's representation:

> it is of course true that the reports, despatches, minutes, judgments, laws, letters etc. in which policemen, soldiers, bureaucrats, landlords, usurers, and others hostile to insurgency register their sentiments, amount to a representation of their will. But these documents do not get their content from that will alone, for the latter is predicated on another will—that of the insurgent. It should be possible therefore to read the presence of a rebel consciousness as a necessary and pervasive element within that body of evidence. (Guha, 15)

The usefulness of the theories given by the Subaltern Studies scholars is that these theories point to the shortcomings of Western philosophy including Marxism in explaining the class-consciousness in "pre-capitalist subaltern". Spivak claims that the Subaltern scholarship poses their reading of the history of the pre-capitalist subaltern population of South Asia against Western Marxism which far from explaining subaltern class-consciousness, would refuse class-

consciousness to the pre-capitalist subaltern, especially in the theatres of Imperialism."(In Other Worlds, 206) To be precise, Spivak, in this book, reiterates the necessity of studying the subaltern from multiple theoretical angles. The theoretical approach to study the subaltern must be deconstructive because an effort to apply one particular theory to understand the subaltern history may result in misinterpreting the history.

I find Ghosh's writing to be such a deconstructive frame which *allows* its subaltern characters to introspect. And more importantly, Ghosh does not restrict himself within portraying the non-elite characters only. In this regard, he even defies the categorical definition set by the Subaltern scholarship—South Asian peasant community. Characters like Murugan, Arjun, Mr. Dey—the civil servant, King Thebaw—the expatriate Burmese king are not subaltern according to Guha's definition. (Already mentioned in this essay). But these characters are indeed marginal according to their contemporary political platform. Ghosh's stories about these common or marginal people grow out most of the times, off some big historical moments e.g. wars, travels etc. The Opium War, the Burmese War, Partition etc.

What becomes problematic is that these many voices are not always synchronous, rather they oppose each other most of the times. As a reader, one may wonder which part the author takes. Is it possible for him to keep a neutral position and depict everything in the most disinterested way? Probably no. The background, education, (to borrow from the Marxist ideology, the historically material scenario) give him a particular perspective. In case of Ghosh, he himself is a postcolonial subject whose understanding of the colonial situation was built on his reading of history of literature of the colonial time as well as the stories and experiences his parents went through. And as soon as self –reflexivity enters someone's writing, which indeed is a case with Ghosh, it becomes very difficult for him to retain a neutral stand. The most difficult impediment which Ghosh might have faced was the demographic segmentation in Bengali society. The unique characteristic in Bengali society, specially in urban Bengali society is its housing of the cross-section called "bhadralok" (the nearest possible English phrase of which is the genteel class). Initially this term bhadralok was used to mean a person of upper caste, who is economically affluent and has access to the Western liberal education and therefore a government job as well. But with the spread of Western education, there was a horizontal upward shift in Bengali society. If the poor, even a landless person could somehow manage to study and earn some academic

degrees and through them come by a respectable salaried job to earn a decent living, he ascends the social ladder and could be labeled as a bhadralok.

Makrand Paranjape in his essay "Beyond the subaltern syndrome: Amitav Ghosh and the crisis of the *bhadrasamaj*" quotes Anshuman A. Mondal, depicting Ghosh's perspective as that of the downtrodden, "uprooted", "unsettled", but can he really be the voice of the people he delineates in his fictions and non-fictions? And this is one of the key questions which motivates my thesis too. Ghosh writes in a language which though is not unknown to Indians (including the less privileged portion) but their proficiency in this language is questionable. English has been being used as an administrative language in India for a long time but the use of this language has been always politicized in postcolonial India. Principally the elite, well off section of Indian society who can afford good quality higher studies have a command over English. Amitav Ghosh, himself coming from this section, having his education in Doon School, St. Stephen's College, Delhi University, and then in Oxford University, London, writes about the non-privileged people of South Asia. Not that all his characters come from the lower caste, poor, uneducated class of society, but there are quite a number of characters who are from the elite section and highly educated. He actually tries to portray the complex tapestry of the elite- non-elite, upper-class- lower-class interaction. While discussing the issue of the agency of the subaltern in literature and film, Paranjape, in the same essay cites examples from Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray. He says, "The subalterns rarely speak for themselves in either Tagore or Ray, but are represented in proxy by the bhadraloks." (363) If Paranjape's observation is assumed true, in a way, both Tagore and Ray by not putting words in the subalterns' mouth, validate Spivak's claim about the subaltern's reticence. David Lloyd problematizes the same issue based on his reading of Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?". He asserts that "the subaltern" as a term has been created at the interface of multiple disciplines. (Purnima Bose, 263) He also voices his doubt whether the intellectuals can represent the subalterns. (Lloyd, Representation's Coup, 3) In her essay, "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value" Spivak articulates her concern for the hegemony of the centre to call the margin, the margin. (Spivak, 200)

Later in the same essay, Spivak points to the hegemony of English in the current discourse of marginality as well as the very issue of a Eurocentric consciousness. She mentions an incident when she was approached by a friend to enlighten on postmodern traits in Third World literature,

and she agreed to do it for a few Bengali writers writing in Bengali. At this point, she was further asked whether these writers are conscious about their marginality. At this moment, there was a clear suggestion that the authors must bring that consciousness of marginality in their writing. (202) The essential problem in this whole discussion is that in the "consolidated disciplinary structure of a neo-colonial" system of power, people often miss how a particular section constructs the margin and wants the margin to imbibe and express its marginality. Thus not only the *centre* has a desire to identify the margin, but wants to hear from the margin as well because the hearing evinces its existence. Here I argue that in such a case when the audibility of a voice depends on the discretion of the listener the listener has the power to stymie the flow of words of the speaker. Taking a cue, I shall study the gap between the subaltern and his/her representation "in proxy" by the elite educated persons in Amitav Ghosh's novels and the problems of the subaltern's representation. The elite representing the Third World subaltern to the West is showed as a problematic representation by Benita Parry in her essay "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse". (Oxford Literary Review). Parry argues that Spivak, Bhabha, and Abdul JanMohammed not only fail to hear the voice of the Third World subaltern, but declare the voice non-existent. Her rationale for such an argument is that because of the vast heterogeneity of social standing, these scholars cannot properly understand the subaltern and hence the misrepresentation. (*The Postcolonial Reader*) Through my study of these theories and Ghosh's novels, I understand the problem as a problem of definition. It matters who is defining what agency is. Sometimes the agency of a certain group or the marginal people can be so marginal as to produce an illusion of non-existence. Dipesh Chakrabarty points to the inability of Western Marxist historiography to recognize agency of the Third World subaltern. He specifically draws attention to Guha's critique of Hobsbawm in *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India (1983).* Hobsbawm recognizes the peasants' "acquisition of political consciousness" to be the moment of political modernity in the Third World and he defines the time before this as "prepolitical". He reads the onset of political awareness amidst the Third World peasants to be the result of colonialism/capitalism. Guha argues that this reading not only fails to identify the voice/agency of the subaltern in colonial or pre-colonial time, it glosses over the commonest social variables like kinship, caste, beliefs which significantly influence one's political consciousness. Thus it reads the Western intervention in the Third World as the giver of language/ agency to the native subaltern. (Chakrabarty 2008: 12-13)

Objectives and methodology

In order to study these issues, I shall look into the various ideological axes which divide most of Ghosh's writings into dichotomous parts. A few such binaries are science-pseudo science, tradition- progress, colonialism-nationalism-cosmopolitanism, etc. But in Ghosh's writing these mutually confronting issues are not neatly compartmentalized, rather there is quite a lot of gray area. A study of these binaries would help me problematize the production and distribution of knowledge. The importance of studying this mechanism is that it explains the hegemony of power in society. And finally it is power which determines who can speak and who cannot.

For studying the above-mentioned issues in Amitav Ghosh's novels, besides the writings of the Subaltern Studies scholars, I shall use works of Antonio Gramsci, several thinkers from the Frankfurt school of Marxism, specially Walter Benjamin, and scholars in the area of Postcolonial thought to build my theoretical framework.Although Marxism as a branch of philosophy started with Karl Marx and Frederich Engels, a lot of thinkers who developed this particular theory deviated from Marx's essential economism and crude materialism. The thinkers of the Frankfurt School are a lot liberal in this regard. They incorporated social theories, history, and anthropology in their works. Antonio Gramsci though was not from the Frankfurt School, as he preceded the foundation of this school, analysed the social and political condition of Italy quite thoroughly. His definition and explanation of the hegemonic influence of the powerful section (bourgeois) on the subordinate class is very enlightening. Walter Benjamin, who was a member of the Frankfurt School developed the translation theory besides many other theories. Although the historians of Subaltern Studies school use Marxism in their analysis, they also point to Western Marxism's inability to fully understand and identify the agency of the Third World subaltern. Through my study of these theories and Ghosh's novels, I understand the problem as a problem of definition. It matters who is defining what agency is. Sometimes the agency of a certain group or the marginal people can be so marginal as to produce an illusion of non-existence. Dipesh Chakrabarty points to the inability of Western Marxist historiography to recognize agency of the Third World subaltern. He specifically draws attention to Guha's critique of Hobsbawm in *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India (1983).* Hobsbawm recognizes the peasants' "acquisition of political consciousness" to be the moment of political modernity in the Third World and he defines the time before this as "prepolitical". He reads the onset of political awareness amidst the

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Postcolonialism is a too vast, heterogeneous, and intriguing field to be defined. Broadly it can be said that different theories within the scope of Postcolonialism flourished as a result of or reaction to colonialism. The publication of Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) is considered to be one of the pioneering works in the field of Postcolonialism. In Orientalism, Said showed how the East or the Orient had become a creation of the West. When the historians and anthropologists of the West wrote or described the cultures of the people of Asia or Africa, they compared the oriental culture to the European ones, taking the European cultures and values as the standard. Said's theory was later criticized and extended further. The critiques of the subaltern scholars like Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Gyan Pandey and others tried to establish a new historiography to dissipate the exaggerations and distortions in the history of Indian subcontinent written by the British. Not only the British point of view, the subaltern studies scholars' effort is to even remove the elitism of the Indians from the Indian history.

Primary texts and chapter division

I have already mentioned that I am going to cover all the novels of Amitav Ghsoh published so far. I have divided my study of these novels into four chapters, each containing two novels. The second chapter consists of *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*. In this chapter, I have studied the power dynamics between the extreme binaries. I have tried to read how the Enlightenment induced modernity in colonial times could cause epistemic violence in Indian society, specially the folk tradition. The European model of modernity is the thread connecting the readings of these two novels. Ghosh shows that the colonial or neo-colonial education system school the indigenous Indians so overwhelmingly, that they fail to identify the exclusive nature of modernity.

In the third chapter, I have taken up *The Shadow Lines* and *The Hungry Tide*, and have studied the problem of representation of the subaltern. I have dealt with the issue of forced

migration against the background of South Asian politics of Partition and the huge stake which the marginal people had to bear for it. In this chapter, I have discussed how the idea of nation remained an elitist construct in colonial and post-Partition South Asia thereby failing to probe into the subaltern consciousness.

The fourth chapter discusses *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke.* I read the commodification of labour and then the human resources of South Asia against the backdrop of opium trade and indentureship. In this course, this chapter also deals in how knowledge and mobility could be major factors in solidifying the case of the subaltern's representation in South Asia. I have discussed how the very idea of subalternity could be relative and context-specific. Neelrattan Haldar, a zamindar is an elite, but the moment he gets bankrupt and is tried at the court, he becomes a marginalized figure.

The fifth chapter covers *The Glass Palace* and *Flood of Fire*. I have focused on the real subalterns, i.e. the non-commissioned Indian soldiers who served in the British army in colonial India. In this chapter I have argued how the militarization of a large population of India under colonial rule made them self-alienated and put their identity at an ontological juncture.

And the sixth chapter is my conclusion to the thesis. This chapter sums up the discussions of the previous chapters and reinforces the theoretical thread which connects all these chapters as well as Ghosh's novels. It also gives the research gaps for future studies on Amitav Ghsoh's works and the Subaltern Studies.

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CHAPTER 2

MODERNITY, SCIENCE, AND THE SUBALTERN IN *THE CIRCLE OF REASON* AND *THE CALCUTTA CHROMOSOME*

In this chapter, I would discuss how Amitav Ghosh presents the relation between the poles of various binaries. I argue that in portraying these relations Ghosh shows that the ideas which are generally perceived to be opposite to each other, in reality, are not so much antithetical. Science vs pseudo-science or religious rituals is the most prominent binary in *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*. In both of these novels, Ghosh hints at certain binaries, but resists the formations of such binaries in order to refute the long-standing European claim on modernity.

David Lloyd cites the problem of anti-colonial nationalist ideology which tries to assimilate the subaltern culture, but cannot accept it also in its entirety because the ideologues themselves are influenced by the ideals of *modernity* propagated by colonial system(s). (4) Tabish Khair shows how there was a conscious erasure of the "symbolic lines of communication," which made British colonization possible in India. (311) And in this process of erasure, not only the gap between the practical' and the 'honorific', but gaps between many other level of society e.g. class, caste, and the private and the public also widened. This creation of fissure between the elite-subaltern relation explains the subaltern's disjunctive relation with modernity. In both of these novels, taken up for discussion in this chapter, Ghosh slams the all-pervasive Eurocentrism in both the colonizers as well as the postcolonial Indian elite's imagination. The chief issues on which the narratives of these two novels hinge on are knowledge and rationality— both widely accepted to be two cornerstones in the genealogy of European modernity. Knowledge, as we see in the Enlightenment discourse has been politicized as "scientific" and "legitimate". If a part of knowledge or any form of epistemology, specially from the non-West does not go in tandem with the discourse of the West, which the West itself defines as the mainstream, is labelled as irrational. Aijaz Ahmad in his polemical reading of Edward Said in "Orientalism and After," writes that racism and putting the *other* (in most cases the women, the aboriginal people, the lower caste subjects) within a pejorative discourse is a common practice both in the East and the West. What makes the difference between the two is the West's power of colonial capitalism. (184)

Eurocentrism as an almost unavoidable phenomenon in the psyche of colonized people, surfaces quite often in Amitav Ghsoh's writing. In *The Imam and the Indian,* we see that the author-narrator and an Egyptian Imam to whose village Ghosh went for research-field, got involved in a debate over different types of performing one's last rites. The author-narrator says that cremation is performed not by Hindus only (in India), but in the Western countries too, people nowadays, opt for cremation. The Imam angrily refutes Ghosh's claim: "They're not an ignorant people. They're advanced, they're educated, they have science, they have guns and tanks and bombs." (*The Imam and the Indian* 10). The author-narrator matches him with a more acerbic repartee, "We have guns and tanks and bombs… we've even had a nuclear explosion. You won't be able to match that in a hundred years" (*The Imam and the Indian* 10-11) Just after it, Ghosh realizes the postcolonial irony which binds both of them together and at the same time, it is the inheritance of colonialism which becomes their point of pride as well as argument: "delegates from two superseded civilizations vying with each other to lay claim to the violence of the West." (*The Imam and the Indian* 11) In both of their speeches, they almost admit the hegemony of the West on *science*. In this same vein, in *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*, two of his earlier novels, Ghosh problematizes the historicity of science and modernity.

While excavating the historicity of science, Ghosh peoples his novels with characters from the native non-elite section. And temporally they spread over both colonial and postcolonial eras. The characterization, even though, is chiefly from the marginal section of society, is varied. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also warns us against any fixed categorization of the subaltern because the subaltern is not a monolithic subject. The statement is truer in the context of the Third World subaltern subject and "the subaltern's persistent emergence into hegemony must always and by definition remain heterogeneous to the efforts of the disciplinary historian." (Spivak, 285) In the next two major sections of this chapter, I would discuss these issues against the backdrops of *The Circle of Reason and The Calcutta Chromosome* respectively.

The Circle of Reason

The Circle of Reason (1986) is Amitav Ghosh's first novel. As it is evident from the very title, reason binds the otherwise loosely knit episodes together in this novel. In Part I ("Sattva") it starts with Balaram who is inspired by Louis Pasteur's biography during his student life at Presidency

College, Calcutta. He and some of his like-minded friends form a club called "The Rationalists' Club". In Part II ("Rajas"), it is his nephew, Alu who carries on Balaram's task of defending reason. Finally, in Part III ("Tamas"), it is Dr. Maithili Prasad Mishra, an Indian doctor in Algeria, who comes up as the protector of reason. Throughout this transcontinental journey of reason, reason is not unqualifiedly championed. Generally, reason is considered to be a weapon to fight against superstitions and such other practices in human civilization, but this novel poses a question on the validity of reason, specially the post-Enlightenment European version of reason or rationality as a universal benchmark.

Rationality as a part of modernity and the ideological crisis of the Indian

Dipesh Chakrabarty gives a detailed genealogy of reason vis-à-vis Bengali modernity in *Provincializing Europe*. He warns against taking up an assumption that reason, as it was inducted as a positive consequence of European Enlightenment into Bengali educated class, is an elitist cultural gesture. Reason, in no way is elitist, but one can find a very constant trend in support of such an assumption in the historicism of reason in colonial Bengali culture. Reason is often posed against ritualistic practices, most of the times, religious or folk traditional. Chakrabarty observes this trend thus: "They have assumed that for India to function as a nation based on institution of science, democracy, citizenship, and social justice, "reason" had to prevail over all that was "irrational" and "superstitious" among its citizens."(*Provincializing Europe,* 237) He argues that dismissing the polytheistic system of the subcontinent as irrational and superstitious makes one harshly judgmental. Moreover, the so-called superstitious practices are mostly associated with the peasant class or the uneducated women of the house. So labeling these marginal groups as superstitious is an act of elitism on the part of the rationalists. Rationality is a priceless gift of the Enlightenment, but one must not forget the relativity of historical and political contexts.

In Indian way of thinking, Ashis Nandy observes that there has always been a discourse to include the plurality of life in India with rational scientific discourse. Many of the Indian educated people of elite society find a conflict within the self because of their Western education and Indian sensibilities. Not that Western (in this case, colonial too) education and Indian sensibilities are mutually exclusive, but these people, educated in this system, find a gap between their cultural-historical reality and their education. I argue that this gap actually stems from a split within the

self of an educated Indian, who by all means cannot ignore his/her Indian self, but is awed by the practical methodical neatness of Western science and in addition to that, is aware of his/her colonized status. Professor Jagadish Chandra Bose's written inscription on the occasion of establishing Basu Bigyan Mandir (which literally translates Basu Temple of Science) is an example of such effort to justify the West through Eastern discourse:

> What I establish today is a temple, not merely a laboratory. Truths which can be sensed are determined by experiments; but there are some great truths which can be reached only through faith. (J.C. Bose, from the inscriptions of "Basu Bigyan Mandir", as quoted by Ashis Nandy, Nandy, *Return from Exile,* 61)

Partha Chatterjee analyses the nature of reason specially in the context of the colonized lands outside Europe. He reads it in the popular texts written in Bengali at that time. It is seen that though reason advocates free thinking and flexibility against the backdrop of religious and cultural orthodoxies, it poses a sort of hegemonic sovereignty of science and technology in the discursive field. Not only that, Chatterjee also observes that reason actually endorses capitalism and legitimizes the colonial rule in different countries in Asia and Africa. ("The Cunning of Reason" 167-171)

The problem on the part of the modernist Bengali rationalists (who most of the times are referred to as bhadralok) is that anything that does not fall into their discourse of rationality, they identify as irrational and superstitious. In *The Circle of Reason*, through the illiterate or less educated people who are considered marginal in academic arena, Ghosh shows the limits of the Western form of rationality or scientific reason. The native elite section (with their colonial education)"become incompatible with cultural tradition, then the latter should have priority over the former…they are close to the ways of real life people…and more restrained by participatory politics…" (Ashis Nandy 1994: 12) The educated bhadralok gentry have a duality in their understanding of themselves as well as the marginal population. On the one hand, they find themselves in an ideological void because they cannot unite their Western education and certain native cultural beliefs which have seeped into their psyche. Therefore, they are continuously in search for analogous situations which could peacefully juxtapose the two. And as a result, they live a life of fragmented identity. Balaram's religious invocation to quark—an elementary particle

of matter is such a case in *The Circle of Reason*. Such an example shows that there is an effort to straddle the perceptions of *Western* science[1] and Indian traditions of belief and this very effort evinces a gap between the two.

Juggling rationality and the arbitrariness in scientific discoveries and the lost narrative/agency of the subaltern

In *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh rids rationality of its elitist hegemony and makes it an expression of the subaltern, in this case the illegal migrants to the Middle East who do blue-collar jobs. Before embarking on the focal issue how Ghosh breaks the hegemony of Western modernity on rationality, here is a brief note on the novel. The novel begins in Lalpukur, a small village in West Bengal, mostly inhabited by the refugees from the Eastern part of Bengal. Alu, the nephew of Balaram Bose, flees from this place following a charge of a blast. Jyoti Das is a young cop from the Intelligence Department. From Lalpukur, Alu flees to Al Ghazira via Kerala. Jyoti Das follows him. Kulfi, Professor Samuel, Karthamma, and some other people are illegal immigrants, doing menial jobs in Al Ghazira—a fictitious city rich in oil in the Middle East. Alu finds his shelter in Zindi's house along with these other immigrants. After most of the immigrants are killed in an encounter with soldiers, Alu, Kulfi, and Zindi with dead Karthamma's son, Boss run away from Al Gazira to Algeria. Jyoti Das too chases them. All of them, coincidentally find themselves in Mrs. Verma's house in Algeria.

The people who migrate from different parts of India get shelter in Zindi's house for a meagre rent. But then, Alu gradually gathers quite a group of followers around him who become staunch supporters of a crusade against germs. These people make Abu's house their place of discussion. Rationality becomes their faith and they build up a parallel economic system. Ghosh shows here that if rationality becomes a faith for a person, it can exterminate him/her. The most popular and easy trope is the pitting of rationality against religious or traditional faith. Ghosh breaks this common myth by portraying rationality as a faith and shows that when it becomes a faith, it devours its devotee the way the people of Abu's house are killed.

As it is already mentioned in this novel, at first, Balaram, and then at the end, Dr. Maithili Prasad Mishra stand as the advocates of reason— the scientific way of looking at things. Balaram repeatedly expresses his high esteem for *Life of Pasteur*. He claims this book to be his guiding

spirit. Though this book is mentioned several times in *The Circle of Reason*, its content is not referred to substantially. But with the mention only, Ghosh provides a significant intertextual link between *Life of Pasteur* and this novel. Ironically, Louis Pasteur whose biography plays the most influential role in shaping Balaram's and then his nephew's philosophy was himself a man torn between his convictions derived from his scientific experiments and his faith as a "Catholic". Pasteur observed his dilemma thus: "In each one of us there are two men, the scientist and the man of faith or of doubt. These two spheres are separate, and woe to those who want to make them encroach upon one another in the present state of our knowledge!" Besides that, if one minutely follows the detailed records of how great inventions were made, they would find that though people extol reason or rationality as the key feature of science, in many cases, the discoveries were just fateful coincidences. Ghosh points to the arbitrary randomness of scientific discovery through the reference to Pasteur. It is known from Pasteur's biography that he came to invent the medicine of Cholera by chance. His assistant forgot to put the sample bacillus in the cupboard of lab and instead left them to the exposed sun for one day, and then Pasteur injected some Cholera-infected chickens with this solution. The chickens got cured. Although in history the entire credit of this discovery is given to Pasteur, one can construe from the actual sequence of happenings that Pasteur had very little to do in the whole process. And his lab assistant, who actually unknowingly made the whole process happen this way remained unnoticed. Scientific discoveries are often "benevolent" accidents. Nonetheless, in the history of science, there evolved a number of branches e.g. Phrenology, Criminology etc. which at one point of time gained huge popularity but were later proved to be baseless pdeudoscience. In his latter novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome,* Ghosh portrays a few characters (Mangala, Lutchman) who practice folk medicine. Claire Chambers describes this group as a "counter-science group". (Chambers, 18) I argue this nomenclature because only Ronald Ross or Western researchers' works cannot be defined as science. In *The Circle of Reason*, though Balaram staunchly champions reason throughout his life, practices Phrenology. Thus, it is evident that like Pasteur, he also suffers from the dilemma between reason and the things which cannot fit into the compartmentalized frame of reason. Balaram himself gets perished in an attempt to erase this divide and before doing that, he destroys the village with buckets of carbolic acid. The problem with such monomaniac people is that they act eccentrically because of a fierce intent to dedicate their life for their philosophy.

Throughout the novel, we see that there is a constant effort to problematize reason, and in the last section, it comes to a full circle in the debate over Kulfi's last rites. Kulfi who probably has had a cardiac condition dies suddenly in Mrs. Verma's house. Out of compassion, Mrs. Verma proposes to cremate her according to Hindu rituals: "We shall have to cremate her ourselves, properly, somewhere among the dunes." (438) Here, Dr. Mishra questions the very concept of a "proper Hindu cremation"(438). Dr. Mishra is against taking any such responsibility as to cremate the dead body from the beginning. He refers to the unavailability of various items e.g. Gangajal (holy water from the Ganga), ghee, sandal wood etc. as the reason for which they should not attempt to cremate her. When Mrs. Verma manages to collect most of the items required for a so called Hindu cremation, he broaches up the dubious marital status of the departed.

Dilemma of the Elite

What is interesting and probably a bit horrific as well in this episode is the debate between two persons, both having commendable knowledge in their own professional fields, over a corpse— whether she should be granted a proper Hindu funeral or not. The crux of the problem is what determines how a person should act in a certain situation. The importance of this episode is that it offers a crucial moment of rupture. At this moment a person's knowledge and general understanding of the ways of the world come at odds. Reason which lies behind every action is questioned. The thematic link which connects all the three parts and the entire chain of events of this novel is the search for reason. That search culminates in such a problematization of reason in the episode of Kulfi's funeral.

Mrs. Verma is against this stubborn nature of one's principles. What is uppermost to her, is being a good human being. At this point, the novel presents an age-old dilemma—what should be prioritized at a moment of judgment –heart or brain. While Mrs. Verma is clearly observing the whole unfortunate situation from a humanitarian point of view, Dr. Mishra's stand is that of a disinterested observer. There is a certain characteristic in his erudite argument which makes him a bit aloof from the situation. No doubt, what Dr. Mishra says in his argument is rational, but there are moments when rationality cannot have the final say. Actually, the imposed objectivity which is considered to be the corner stone of rationality is the bone of contention in this debate between Dr. Mishra and Mrs. Verma.

Rationality achieved its triumphant status when the ideas of Enlightenment gradually seeped down to the praxis of life. The result of this spread of Enlightenment ideas was a highly specialized treatment of different spheres of life. Jurgen Habermas describes in his essay, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project" how the objective rationalization of the social relations increased "the distance between the expert cultures and the general public."(45) This observation is evident in Mrs. Verma's argument in which she describes that as a microbiologist how much important it is to her to not forget that she is a human being. In her profession it is her job to identify the microbes and bacteria in human body which cause different types of pains. Here she compares her role with that of a motor-mechanic. A motor mechanic checks different parts of an automobile to ascertain the reason behind the dysfunction of the machine. He inspects each part minutely. A microbiologist does almost the same thing. In fact, his/her case is rather metonymically impersonal. The mechanic still has the whole car to inspect which part runs out of order. Similarly a surgeon too, Mrs. Verma thinks, is luckier than her in this regard. In the laboratory, the microbiologist has only the bottled specimens of blood, urine, or different body serums. She is weirdly alienated from the real person. S/he has to test them for the diagnosis of the disease the person is suffering from. The patient is equally impersonal to him/her as the microbiologist to the patient. Because of this distance between the patient and the microbiologist, the microbiologist has to remind him/herself again and again that s/he is a human being too. The same is applicable to the patients also, but Mrs. Verma feels sorry that it is the "tyranny of…despotic science" which "forbade" the medical practitioner "to tell one that…all you have to do to cure yourself is try to be a better human being." (445)

The advancement of science has created an atmosphere for rational thinking but the partisans of rational thinking applied this method so arduously that rational thinking became superstition's other. To be more precise, it became a type of faith for some people. People like Balaram, or Dr. Mishra, forget to look at their surrounding without the lens of reason. Here the problem in following the uncustomized version of post-Enlightenment rationality is that it asks the observer to have a disinterested look and to count only those solid facts which will lead him/her to the right judgment. It is a matter of debate whether the outcome of this process is the right judgment or not, but it, in a way, it inculcates an emotional detachment in the observer's mind. S/he forgets to feel empathy towards a sufferer or any other being and instead gives everything a status of object.

This is exactly the point over which Mrs. Verma's replacement of Gangajal with the water from her kitchen-tap is questioned by Dr. Mishra. Dr. Mishra reprimands Mrs. Verma for believing in the custom of pouring Gangajal on the lips of the dead: …you as a rational, educated woman wish to encourage anyone in the belief that a bit of dirty water from a muddy river can actually do them any good when they're already dead." (434) What is crucial here is neither the dirtiness of the water from the Ganga, nor the replacement of it with water from sub-Saharan water table, but Mrs. Verma, being an educated woman, indulging in this superstitious practice. Dr. Mishra does not tell the very word "superstitious", but the implication of his words is quite the same. The problem here is the tendency of identifying reason to be a part of modernity and modernity being inseparably linked to European Enlightenment. This tendentious identification of reason actually leads one to identify anything which does not fit in this reason-modernity network as premodern and therefore irrational. Dipesh Chakrabarty also lists this tendentious judgment in the writings of noted Bengali scholars from different disciplines. He observes how Satyendranath Bose, a noted scientist terms science as knowledge which necessarily opposes religion: "…(Science) was obliged to oppose religion whenever religion [presumed to] speak about things on this earth."(*Provincializing Europe,* 237)Thus these rationalists consider science and religion as two poles of a binary.

It is too difficult and almost impossible to consider European Enlightenment as a universal mold in which cultural history of any place and every place can be cast. An unsympathetic dismissal of local praxis and forceful imposition of knowledge and ideas derived from the Enlightenment ideals are tantamount to an epistemic violence. In *The Circle of Reason,* all the declared rationalists—Balaram, Dr. Mishra, even Alu exactly do it. They dismiss anything for which they do not find a viable reason at hand, though they are never ready to accept that their vision might be incomplete or obstructed. Thus, when Dr. Mishra rejects the proposition of cremating Kulfi's dead body because he does not find any reason to help Alu in this critical juncture, but in the same situation an Indian tourist's prospective difficulty with the corpse of his suddenly killed wife emotionally moves Mrs. Verma. When Dr. Mishra asks Mrs. Verma not to worry about Kulfi's cremation because "You don't even know them." (437), logically he may sound right, but Mrs. Verma puts the case as something for which one should cross the threshold of logic. She behaves in a more humanitarian way. Her counter-argument is that because she has offered help when she was alive, why she should not arrange for her last rites when she is dead

and that too in her own house. Therefore, what is rational or what is not, is not always absolute. In the first section of the book, it is seen how the rigidity of rationality can cause annihilation. Balaram Bose in his adamant pursuit of reason not only destroys the whole village with carbolic acid, but gets cremated alive with his family. Mrs. Verma argues for moderation.

When it comes to a ritual or a religious practice, Dr. Mishra, who plays the rationalist here, questions Mrs. Verma about every deviation from the rule. On the other hand, Mrs. Verma sounds more rational for not being rigid about the religious rules. In her reply to Dr. Mishra's scathing comment for her use of carbolic acid instead of Gangajal for cleaning the place for the corpse, Mrs. Verma is splendidly clear about her point. She argues that because Gangajal was considered holy for its purity at one point of time, it may not be such always. In her circumstances, where the availability of Gangajal is impossible, (and its purity is questionable too), it is quite reasonable to use carbolic acid instead.

Rigidity in rationalism for which Dr. Mishra emphasizes repeatedly on rules, is, according to Mrs. Verma, the cause behind the destruction of everything. Mrs. Verma thinks that this is the rigidity in the thought of the so called rationalists which ultimately spoils everything: "All you ever talk about is *rules*. That's how you and your kind have destroyed everything—science, religion, socialism—with your rules and your orthodoxies." (emphasis added, 442)

There is another tendency among the declared rationalists in *The C*ircle *of Reason* which may be termed as unflinching bookishness. Initially Balaram is seen to be too much dependent on what are written in a book instead of what the circumstances offer him. Later, Dr. Mishra too, cites always from books and Hindu scriptures in order to counter Mrs. Verma's proposition to cremate Kulfi's dead body. Mrs. Verma refers to her father Late Hem Narayan Mathur to be like that too. Her father, as Mrs. Verma remembers, used to consider the books in his bookshelf to be his only friends. Mrs. Verma was against this as her point was that loving inert objects was unnatural because then, it becomes one-way. Even if a person loves books, books cannot love that person in return. Thus when Alu, discovering *Life of Pasteur*, in Mrs. Verma's bookshelf says that it is like a reunion with his brother, Mr. Verma expresses her lack of conviction in the statement.

Alu's muscular atrophy in his thumbs is another such example. Alu's thumbs got a bit rigid because of muscular atrophy, but the condition incapacitates his mind so much that whenever he

is conscious about his thumbs, he cannot do anything with his hand. When he tells Mrs. Verma that he would not be able to light the pyre of Kulfi because of his thumbs, Mrs. Verma reminds him that he has cut the wood for making the pyre himself. Being the disciple of his rationalist uncle as well as foster-father, Balaram, Alu has been trained to judge everything according to the cause and effect relation. Thus, as he has a condition in his thumbs, he is led to believe that he cannot do anything with his hand. The blockage here is rather mental than physical. After the cremation of Kulfi, it seems Alu is cured not only of his thumbs but his ailment of playing slave to reason for everything. After he sets the fire on the pyre, he realizes the futility of keeping *Life of Pasteur* with him. He throws the book into the burning pyre. There remains only a slight hint of suspicion about his cure when he produces the container of Kulfi's ash to be a "good reason" for going home. Thus, rationalism, as these advocates of rationalism depicts it to be, seems too rigid to allocate/accomodate free will of a person. Alu himself could have a will to go or to not go back to India. He does not tell about what he wants but he produces the reason why he should go to which place.

In this episode of funeral which serves as a closure, brings all the characters of different strata of society—the poor and marginal people and the elites together. The marginal people here are the unskilled labourers who are illegal immigrants as well (Kulfi, Alu, Zindi). On the other hand, Jyoti Das (a civil servant), and Mrs. Verma, her husband, Dr. Mishra who are medical practitioners in a part of Algeria constitute the elite cross-section of this novel. The meeting of these two apparently opposite sections of society do not end up in conflict. With Kulfi's body, *The Life of Pasteur* too is put on the pyre. The incident does not symbolize an end of reason. Amitav Ghosh does not put reason as an unsustainable part of human intellectuality, but by presenting the difference of interests and emotions of these two aforementioned sections of society shows that blindly following reason might make one take a lopsided view. It is the path of liberal humanism which ultimately emerges as the balancing element.

At the end of the novel, when Jyoti Das's pursuit comes to an end and Alu and Jyoti Das converse face to face, Alu asks him about the fate of the people who have survived the blast of Al Ghazira. Jyoti Das tells what he knows but he mentions Professor Samuel specially. When he was being deported with other people, Jyoti Das, as he tells Alu, found Professor Samuel shouting to him: "The queue of hopes stretches long past infinity."(442) This sentence captures the basic flaw

in the meticulously disciplined argument of the declared rationalists in *The Circle of Reason*. Hope does not necessarily have any valid reason always. Had it been so, Zindi, after literally losing everything could not set on a new journey with little Boss in her lap, with a hope to start life anew.

The Calcutta Chromosome

> The Ministry of AYUSH is formed in 9th November 2014 for providing more healthcare. The Department of Indian Medicine and Homeopathy (ISM&H) was created in March 1995 and renamed as Department of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) in November 2003, with a view to providing focused attention to development of Education and Research in Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy systems. (http://www.indianmedicine.nic.in/)[2]

This statement which is given as a running head of the website of the Ministry of AYUSH, India sounds quite ironic if one looks at the colonial picture of health and medicine in retrospect. A nation/country which at one point of time faced an aggressive campaign in favour of embracing Western Medicine in order to make a notch in the path of progress, now is trying to uphold the tradition which it forgot in its journey of progress. This motivational declaration of the Ministry has been an inspiration while reading *The Calcutta Chromosome* and has helped me to look at the novel from different theoretical perspectives. Here I attempt to read Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* as a critique of the history of science. The book was published in 1995 and the author received the Arthur C. Clarke Award for this book in 1996. Ghosh tries to unravel a possible narrative in the history of science which can potentially deconstruct the accepted narrative of history. He delineates how scientific research specially the medical research becomes a site of contestation in the era of colonialism. Ghosh not only depicts the picture of research in Western Medical science in colonial India, but presents how the folk healing system was also functioning at the same time. By reconstructing a possible counter history of malaria research in India, Ghosh tries to give agency to those unrecognized marginal people in the history of science whose contribution remained unsung in the documented history. In addition to that, the complex relation between Western medicine/ science and the traditional Indian healing practices available both in the higher rung of Indian social hierarchy and among marginal people is also explored. It is discussed how the subtle moves towards establishing the Western system in all the cases e.g.

medicine, learning, knowledge gradually try to settle a hegemonic foundation of Western modernity in India. Besides this, it is also argued how the knowledge produced in India has always been authenticated only by the parameters of the West. Secondly, it is not only about deconstructing the history of science, but by mixing up different generic styles, Ghosh challenges the categorization of different disciplines. Barriers between generic disciplines, even that of between religion and science are often transcended. Daniel Headrick has described Western medicine as an expansionist tool of Western imperialism. Gyan Prakash points to a relation between the formation of different disciplines of science and the expanding Western imperialism. (12-13) Here I read the interface of science/knowledge, modernity, and religious practices as these aspects are portrayed in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, specially the way in which the relation between Western medicine and Western imperialism against the background of malaria research in colonial India is unraveled. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the narrative is not temporally located within the colonial time only. Murugan, a character who is a medical historian in this novel, looks back at the colonial research in the 1990s and by producing certain circumstantial evidences of that time when Ross pursued his research in Malaria, still available, tries to draw a credible story, which counters the accepted documented history.

In several pieces of his writing, Amitav Ghosh discusses the inherent problem of the concept of modernity. Modernity which is essentially a European concept pertains within it the empiricist nature of knowledge. Anshuman A. Mondal observes how Ghosh highlights this particular characteristic of Western knowledge as a flaw. The problem in assuming knowledge as essentially empiricist is that it discards everything which is not empirical. (42-3) In discourses outside the West, in case of India, empiricism is not cancelled outright but it is not considered as the foundational base as well. Because of such exclusive nature of Western science, Indian tradition of knowledge is discarded. In support of the West's emphasis on empiricism and a lack of it in Indian tradition, Engler observes that in Indian tradition, arguments are rhetorical and not empirical. (Engler, 10) The indigenous traditions of healing practiced by the subaltern people of the subcontinent, though "are not the historical prototype" of Western sciences, "nor their practical by-products" are according to Michel Foucault, knowledge. (*The Archeology of Knowledge*, 183)

Western Medicine as a tool of colonial expansionism

"Colonialism used—or attempted to use—the body as a site for the construction of its own authority, legitimacy, and control." (Arnold, 8) Controlling diseases, or to be more precise, controlling epidemic became a way of controlling the body. In the colonies, thus, medicine was not confined within its therapeutic limits but it spills the discursive boundaries and becomes a significant component in the colonial politics. Not only with surgical instruments, but with its discourse, and scrutinizing gaze, the medical fraternity has a sort of hegemonic corporeal control over the body. The surgeons of East India Company, as Arnold observes, understood the richness of Indian variety of diseases. Despite their own relative inaccessibility to mainstream European Medicine, they felt that the transmission of knowledge is not necessarily unidirectional i.e. from center to periphery. Sometimes it could be the other way round. (Arnold, 23)

Popularly it is considered that the Western medicine became an immediate hit from the moment of its entrance into Indian geography, while the real truth is a bit different. Neither it is British colonial period which brought Western medicine in contact with the Indian medical system or the Indian population, nor was it an instant hit. Indian medicine, like any branch of Indian civilization, got an exposure to the West, through cultural exchanges between India and the West which as the documented history goes, happened first during the Indo-Greek interaction. (Arnold, 14)

In 1613 Jesuit missionary Roberto Nobili included "Aiur vedam" in his list of sciences of the brahmins, and he drew an implicitly ideological line through each of the various scientiis quas Brahmanes tractant. (At this time, of course, "science" was a general term for a system of thought.) On the other hand, Nobili sifted his sources for what he considered to be religion, and he found in the concept of Brahman a reference to the "one, true, immaterial God, at least as far as it was possible for him to be known through the natural light of reason" (Halbfass, 40). Francoise Bernier collected aphorisms from Ayurvedic texts in the 17th century and he commented that they were precise and rational. (Arnold, 45) Thus the general claim that it is the introduction of Western Medicine in India in the colonial era which enriched Indian Medical canon is not wholly true.

However, the introduction of Western medicine in India gave a new dimension to the relation between a doctor and a patient. A doctor has the power to intervene the bodily functions of a patient. In that way he has a special authority over the patient's body. The thing becomes doubly complicated when the doctor-patient relation fits into the colonizer-colonized frame i.e. the doctor is a representative from the colonizers' race and the patient belongs to the colonized race. Moreover in case of malarial research, there is an exotic element in it because of its prevalence in the tropical regions. Besides, controlling a person's physical well-being can be considered as a means to controlling the person's body. Thus the West by acting as the physician, in this case, controls the body of the colonized race.

Foucault demonstrates that the various ways like "gymnastics", "exercise", "muscle-building" etc. which are motivationally insisted on the body specially of children and soldiers, are actually means to control the body. He further asserts that Marxism, in order to emphasize too much on consciousness and soul, relegated body to the backstage of discourse, while in the age of capital, it is the body through which, the state celebrates as well as wields its power. (*Power/ Knowledge*, 56-57) In the same vein, it can be said that the control of contagion can be a form of controlling the body. Inoculation in the colonies was thus an attempt to overpower the body of the colonized. Thus inoculation or any such state-sponsored health measure is an example of the administration's willingness to bring the body of the society, in this case, the colonized people, under the exertion of its power.

When it comes to identify a class which practises medicine, Western ethnographers document only the literature available among the practitioners of Ayurveda or Yunani, but there was indeed a folk tradition of medicine practised by the community of Dom, barbers, and a few other such communities. Fabrizio Ferrari observes that the vaidyas also gathered a huge repository of medical knowledge from farmers, herders, hunters, monks, and jungle dwellers. Thus unlike the Western tradition, the practice of medicine is not limited within the professionals. (Ferrari, intro: xxii) In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, we see that all the practitioners of folk medicine—Mangala, Lakshman hail from the most humble section of society. Mangala is depicted as a sweeper woman working in Ronald Ross's laboratory, but she is actually a demi goddess revered by marginal people. Ghosh not only hints at the intertwined relation between medicine and religion in contemporary India, but shows that the Hindu pantheon is also not classless. In the novel, Mangala

is the presiding goddess worshipped by the marginal people and it is quite obvious that she is not worshipped by the upper-caste people. In fact, her name is also unknown to them.

Colonial medicine/Western science has had a very complex relation with indigenous Indian practice of folk medicine. The complexity is partly because of the almost inextricable association of medicine and religion in Indian context. There are quite a number of deities mostly goddesses who are considered to be the presiding deities of certain diseases in many parts of India. Interestingly, in case of the subaltern tradition of folk medicine, the deities who preside over, are not the elite deities of the vast Hindu pantheon. Gods and Goddesses like Sitala, Mariamma, Manasa, Ghentu are believed to be the deities of certain diseases and illnesses by their devotees. In The Calcutta Chromosome, the way in which Amitav Ghosh describes the genealogy of Mangala, resembles the origin of many gods and goddesses worshipped mainly by subalterns of South Asia. As described in the novel, a middle aged village woman finds a stone while bathing in a pond and then the rural people imposes divinity on it because of its miraculous power. The incident underscores the role of the subaltern people who in spite of being marginalized by elite Hindus, create a sort of Hinduism which despite its namesake, is vastly different from the ritualistic Hinduism practised by elite Hindus. Interestingly, as the deities of the subalterns remained unknown or invisible to the upper-caste elite people, the subalterns themselves prefer invisibility. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the subaltern group function in obscurity. The British scientists for their experiments and study depended heavily on their subaltern assistants or orderlies but rarely did they acknowledge the contributions of these marginal people.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, it has become a more pointed critique of the historicism of science. In the whole documented history of the discovery of the malaria parasite and the vector, who presides supreme is Sir Ronald Ross. His Indian laboratory assistants or the people on whom he tested a theory did not get any recognition. Even in his own memoire, Ross does not enlist all the names of his assistants, but it cannot be denied that without their support, Ross's success would have been an impossibility. In his interview given to Paul Kincaid, Ghosh reveals that he finds from Ross's diary that it was Lutchman or Laakhan (he is a real character in T*he Calcutta Chromosome*) who taught Ross the differences between various species of mosquitoes. Besides offering such circumstantial knowledge, the native lab assistants and people of such standing often offered their bodies for medical experimentations. In the novel, the use of an indigenous man's

body by British scientists in exchange of money is mentioned quite sarcastically. While boarding in Mrs. Aratounian's house, Murugan has a hallucination of being transported to a past incarnation in which he was one of the people whom British scientists used in their experiments.

> …lying on a hard hospital charpai, stripped, naked, watching the English doctor uncork a test-tube full of mosquitoes into his net. In his fist he still held on to them tightly, savouring their feel, their reassurance; they were so cool to the touch, so hard –edged; they made everything so simple, so clean: a handful of coins, a rupee, for handing on the thing that lived in his blood, for safe-keeping, to the doctor." (135)

This incident can be read as a violation of medical ethics by the British doctors.

David Arnold observes that though the practice of Western medicine was limited within a few cities which were administratively important in colonial British India, it gained popularity gradually among the middle class Indians educated in the colonial system. What is unsaid here is that whatever amount of interest and enthusiasm the middle-class people harbour for Western medicine, they never volunteered their bodies for the experiment of the Western medicine. The Western medical practioners, actually by coming to India got a wonderful pool of people on whom they could experiment their invented concoction freely. The body of the Indian subaltern, it seems, was always ready and receptive for such activities.

Thus the initiation of Western medicine in India has multiple consequences. It was responsible for reviving the age old indigenous Indian medical practices. Sometimes the latter simulated the Western medicines, and sometimes it found itself in competition with the Western Medicines which motivated its flourish. (Arnold, 29) Arnold also observes that initially the Europeans depended mostly on Indian medical practitioners thinking that they were better knowledgeable in the matters of diseases caused in this particular land and climate. (35) But what is most intriguing is the two-fold nature of the relation between Western medicine and India. There is a contact between the indigenous Indian medicinal practices and the Western medicine. And secondly, the Western medicine and the Indian body—or to be more precise, the colonizer's medicine and the colonized's body. There is a distinct gaze of the colonizer even when they experiment with the native Indian's body.

The elite, urban section of Indians kept themselves aloof from Western medicine as long as possible. Thus it is only the lower caste, lower class Hindu and Muslim population whom British doctors and scientists found at their disposal. Here it should be noted that the colonial judiciary put utmost importance on written documents. Warren Hastings, one of the earliest British administrators who voiced the importance of building a knowledge bank of India, stressed on using written documents. (Cohn, 315) As a result, in this writing process of India's history and formulating personal Laws for both Hindus and Muslims, only the written religious scriptures were taken into account. Naturally, the persons who were consulted were either Hindu Pundits (Brahmins) or Maulavis (Muslim theologians). Consequently, the marginal people of either community had very little or no representation at all in colonial written documents. The elite, as some historians argue, even though were first to get the opportunities of colonial education system, built a resistance against colonialism. Because of this resistance and their mark in various colonial systems, specially academia and administration, the native elite people had some representations, compared to the marginal natives. (Barrow and Haynes, 472)

The claim of logic and empiricism in the post Enlightenment Western tradition of knowledge

Ghosh writes a great deal about the history of science, specially the historicism of this particular discipline. In both *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*, it is observed that there is a partisan approach of history towards the dignitaries of scientific knowledge. In the history of science, there evolved a few branches of sciences e.g. Phrenology, Criminology, which gained popularity for certain period of time but later were proved to be baseless. On the other hand, the specializations like Virology or Mycology proved to be solidly established on realistic theories. But in the documentation of history, the importance always gravitates towards the latter. The people whose scientific endeavours did not bear fruit rarely got a mention in the history. Thus here also it is the history of victors. In both *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome,* Ghosh mentions these so called pseudosciences. This very origin of pseudosciences actually proves the arbitrariness in science.

While giving multiple examples of how arbitrary and fateful, the field of experimental science is, Ghosh draws a picture of how the lower caste marginal people of colonial India, were carrying on with their practice of folk medicines. The principal difference between the Western

mode of research and the Indian subaltern system is that while in Western system recognition of certain knowledge is highly desirable, in Indian system, people generally did not care much for the social recognition of their findings. This is the reason that there are many texts written in ancient and medieval India, which do not bear the names of writers. It is often alleged by the Western scholarship that there is no history (the discipline as defined in the Western system of knowledge) of India. In the Western tradition, the inextricable relation between knowledge and literacy is a primary factor which makes the West vastly different from the Orient. In the Indian tradition, there is the existence of writing but the oral tradition is also esteemed very highly. In case of the subaltern traditions (e.g the tribals), still they are chiefly oral. Even if we think about the high caste elite Hindu tradition, we would find that even the Vedas were not written originally. All the mantras in the Rigveda were recited only and the Samaveda is chiefly the compilation of the rules of chanting the mantras of the Rigveda. The unwillingness to document one's findings or make others know about this partly explains the absence of history in precolonial India. Hegel attributes this lack of history to the Indians' not having the concept of nation. (Guha, 52)The group of scholars who have been working in the field of Subaltern Studies are working in order to untwine history from the concept of nation. In spite of this association of history with nation, nation is a modern subject altogether and as a discourse, it was very much a European concept. Actually the appreciation of knowledge has some differences between the Indian and Western sensibilities. Edmund Husserl, in his comparative study of Oriental and Western science and philosophy asserts that the Greek-European science is more universal and purely theoretical in nature, while the former is mythical-religious. (as expounded by Dipesh Chakraborty in his essay on Indian pasts, 3). Such estimation of the Indian traditions of knowledge by the Western scholars resulted into the waning of the funds (by private as well as government agencies) provided for the study of the oriental subjects in colonial India.

The funds and arrangements for the study of Ayurveda and Yunani, to be more precise the Indian medical practices were no longer sanctioned after 1835. Like some other supercilious Anglicists, T. B. Macaulay gives his vitriolic opinion in this matter too. He observes that funding the study of Indian subjects were a waste of tax-payers' money because

> Medical doctrine which would disgrace an English farrier, astronomy which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school, history abounding with kings thirty feet

> high and reigns thirty thousand years long, and geography made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter. (Macaulay in de Bary 1968, 2:44)

At the time of the establishment of the British rule and their education system, they actually found eager supporters from the Indian civil society as well. Rammohan Roy who is widely regarded as the father of Modernity in India, wrote a lot in support of the establishment of a full-fledged Western education system. His emphasis on the essential requirement of "Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Anatomy, Chemistry, and other useful sciences" (emphasis added) (as quoted by James, Rapson, 105) for the foundation of the Colonial education system in India implies his underestimation of the existing or ancient education system of India. It means that he did not consider the subjects taught in the then indigenous academia to be useful. It reveals his contempt for the uselessness (if it is so) of subjects of Indian academic discourse. Here the crux of the problem is not the Western education but the Western tendency to reject everything Indian as irrational. The problem in the pedagogical acceptance of history as a secular subject only is that it entails the risk of forgetting or removing many aspects which are generally considered as non-secular e.g. gods, spirits, superstitions, pagan rituals etc. Dipesh Chakrabarty elucidates that their existence does not depend on the belief of social scientists, but they claim their existence because of human practices. (*Provincializing Europe* 111) Amartya Sen makes three divisions of the ways in which Western scholars estimate Indian culture—"exoticist approach", "magisterial approach", and "curatorial approach". (141) The magisterial approach serves as an excuse in support of the colonisation of India because scholars taking up this approach (e.g. James Mill, T.B. Macaulay) dismiss any claim of the Indians to significant scientific or artistic contribution to human civilization. (147) This tendency to not acknowledge the seriousness in the body of research and knowledge produced in India points to the West's Orientalist assumption about India.

Ghosh questions the hegemony of the West on modernity. And the way he juxtaposes the subaltern healing system of India with the Western colonial medical system, this argument becomes more accentuated. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Western science is hybridized at the hands of the Indian lab assistants working for British scientists. Arnold discusses extensively on the dialogic relation between Western medicine and the indigenous Indian ones during the colonial period. He argues that both underwent certain transformations and hybridizations. (Arnold, 14) The cultural hybridization on the part of the colonizers is evident in their establishment of different

hospitals for different castes of people. Initially in order to make the Western Medicine acceptable to orthodox Indian society British administrators established separate hospitals for different castes. (Arnold, 250) It can be considered as an incentive given to the Western Medicine, so that it can gradually establish a hegemony over the rest of the healing systems of the country. In case of Ayurveda and a few other healing systems too such casteist practice was prevalent. Thus though the Western scholars flaunted of science being secular, when it came to the practice of that science in India, they too did as the Indians used to do.

Science is often considered as one of the precursors of modernity, but Ghosh shows that like modernity, science can also evolve without the hegemonizing influence of the West. The kind of structural methodology, the West has prescribed for science is not accepted as a full-proof method by Ghosh. The question which Murugan asks Antar sort of sets the tone of *The Calcutta Chromosome*: "Do you think that everything that can be known, should be known?" (52) The subaltern practitioners of medicine believe that to know something is to change it. In the novel, Murugan explicates an alternative way of exploring science: "Think of Ramanujan, the mathematician, […]. He went ahead and reinvented a fair hunk of modern mathematics just because nobody had told him that it had already been done […]." (209) Murugan suggests that Mangala's feat in the field of scientific experiment is exactly like that. She has chosen an alternative path to work in the field of Malaria research. She could do it more freely because she was not trained in the conventional Western method of science and thus is not tied down by its crippling restrictions: "…she wasn't carrying a shit-load of theory in her head, she didn't have to write papers or construct proofs." (244) There is an oblique reference to the coincidental breakthroughs of scientific discoveries here. Many inventions were actually fortunate coincidences and later on the scholars had to erect theoretical frameworks to produce them as proofs.

Many inventions and discoveries in science happened by chance e.g. the antibiotic property of penicillin or Pasteur's vaccine for hydrophobia. In *The Calcutta Chromosome,* it has been subtly proposed that Ross's discovery in the pursuit of malarial parasite too was such a fluke, at least on the part of Ross. While nothing is happening in the world in this particular field, and even Ross's research too has not been producing impressive results, suddenly he finds someone (Abdul Kadir as he is mentioned in *The Calcutta Chromosome* and he was a real person living at the time of Ronald Ross), whose blood sample discloses exemplary phenomena under the microscope. In the

novel Murugan suggests that it is not Ross who has hand-picked Abdul Kadir, but Abdul Kadir has actually chosen Ross. Thus Ghosh gives a unique example which makes us revise our general assumption about the network of power in South Asian social hierarchy. Commonly it is assumed that it is the economically more powerful class which determines how the lower and less powerful sections would move or act. In this novel it is suggested that already a group of marginal people have been working on malaria when Ross begins his research on malaria. The group because of their marginal social status keep their findings at low key. They achieve substantial success in understanding the nature and reactions of Plasmodium falciparum, but they are stuck at a certain point and cannot get over it. At that very moment they find Ross and feel that because of his knowledge of and access to certain experimental sophistication, he could transcend this deadlock. Contrarily, here Abdul Kadir, almost a non-entity, compared to Ronald Ross, according to his social or economic power in colonial India, actually maneuvers Ross's experiments, but Ross never comes to know that he is being manipulated. Thus, Ghosh shows that sometimes the agency of the subaltern may be so subtle as to create the illusion of nonexistence.

It is interesting to note here that the Indian society has often been subject to severe criticism because of its myriad caste divisions, but when the West was involved in experimental research specially in medicine it relied much on the casteist divisions of the native society. To be precise, the West exploited the casteist division. Ideologically, the colonizers castigated caste- divisions, but the upper caste Hindu society as well as the secular British scientists depended on the people who lay in the fringes of the society. Both the Europeans and low-caste people did not have free accessibility in the sphere of the elite castes, but gradually the white people paved a way by their technological, economic and military prowess. Although the Europeans did not completely subscribe to the elite people's notion about the marginal castes, they relied on these people for the baser jobs in daily life. Thus came this weird combination — the white man's medicine and the polluted people. The low caste people's (namely the community of Dom) indispensableness was primarily in the mortuary. From pre-colonial times the men of this caste traditionally cremated the dead bodies and the women served as midwives. Thus their lives both of men and women were very close to the human body, yet this proximity elicited such a strong abomination in the so called higher caste people that their touch was avoided in the prime time between birth and death. Therefore, it is not unnatural that because of their dealing with birth and death, they had certain knowledge about the application of some indigenous medicines and herbs. Although they are never

allowed to touch the body or to come in the vicinity of it in normal situation, they are the only people who the practitioners of the Western medicines found available to help them in the dissection room.

But when it comes to the writing of history of the colony, the colonial scholars did mention the caste system and the complexity of it due to aversion and domination, but did not care to document the medicinal practices seriously. This subject gets a reference as a part of the Oriental mumbo-jumbo. Benjamin Heyne directs towards the cultural difference as a cause which makes the Oriental texts specially the medical ones impossible for Europeans to translate into European languages. The aphorisms, recurrent use of allusions (which sometimes are religious), mentions of rituals make the texts unintelligible for Europeans. Moreover, Heyne specially mentions the poetic style of writing to be another reason of difficulty in translation and understanding. (125) Besides, the review of the Oriental medical practice was not limited within the linguistic or cultural differences, but different types of medical practices. Besides the Ayurvedic and Yunani traditions, there were groups of subalterns (specially from the community of Dom) who also provide certain remedies for ailments, but these practitioners knew only about the practical usage of the remedies they provide, they never had any theoretical knowledge as such. This is another point which the European scholars sarcastically dig at.

Thus the lack of conventional institutional knowledge or the tradition among the subaltern medical practitioners elicited the European scholars' derision for the folk medical tradition of India. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the primary concern of the secret subaltern group of malaria researchers was theoretical knowledge. This issue has been addressed even by William Twining who did some research on malaria in Bengal in early 19th century:

> "The natives of this country generally use remedies in any disease, from practical knowledge of their efficacy, without much reasoning; therefore, I would not reject any of their therapeutical expidients as despicable, without an enquiry into their, and an experimental modus operendi, and an experimental investigation of their utility." (as quoted by Arnold, 51)

Thus on the one hand, the scholars, some of whom, worked in the discipline of medicine regarded India as no other exception and gave a generalized off hand view about the diseases of the land.

Their judgment was, most of the times, derived out of the books written about India or simply fabricated. But a number of medical practitioners, though they were estranged from the mainstream of Medical science of West because of the geographical reason, regarded their career in India as a great opportunity to learn about a considerable variety of ailments. Morehead who once dismissed the singularity of India as an interesting domain of medical research observed in more ripe age:

> …habit, food, and climate exercise indisputable influence upon the human system, both in a healthy and diseased state; and it is equally important to pathology and physiology, to determine the modifications which they induce, and the varieties that may be attributed to their operation, in a country so different as India, both in its physical and social relations, from those regions in which medical observation has been hitherto most extensively engaged. (Arnold, 20)

While the British administration in India set up a system to combat the diseases, it cannot be denied that the British colonisers themselves have particular contribution to the spreading of Malaria. There are many references to railways in colonial India in *The Calcutta Chromosome.* This iron network no doubt, united the whole country geographically but like irrigation too, this was the colonisers' another means to enhance the collection of revenues and raw materials from the jewel on the crown. Naturally, all the references to railways—the ghostly incident at Renupur station, or the motif of railway signal lantern remind one of a diabolically material cunning behind the establishment of the railways in India. Western technology, the railways in case of India literally served as a form of colonial expansionism. Occurrences of Malaria had been there in India before the British came but with the aggressive networking of irrigation system in order to boost up the agricultural yield, and setting up of industry in cities like Calcutta and Bombay without any serious attention to the hygiene of the workers' quarters, the disease became more frequent and spread to certain pockets of the country where it had been hitherto nonexistent. (Packard, 87-88)

The epistemological differences in Indian and Western systems of knowledge/ science

The basic condition of the claims of truth which history or historiography demands are reasons and evidences. Archeological or archival evidences are produced as the evidences to support what historians speak or write about a certain time, or incident or a person of the past. Now the basic fallacy in this system of knowledge is that if there is nothing as such which can be

produced as an evidence, an incident or phenomenon is regarded as fictitious. Most of the time the history which we read as the text is either economic or political and always written by the literate elites of the society. Thus there is only one cultural perspective of history. Rarely, the marginal people get a role there. They are, in the language of film, always in the crowd scene—groups of faceless non-entities. Thus any sort of cultural practices or ethnic characteristic of these people go unmentioned in the documented history. Consequently, when the colonizers took up the job of building a reportorial knowledge bank about the colonized land, they missed to include many information related to the marginal low caste people. It should be noted here that the traditions of the subalterns in India has always been carried on orally. Thus, although some scholars were interested in retrieving Oriental culture and tradition, they unknowingly overlooked the culture of the subalterns because they primarily studied whatever was available in text.

Lou Ratté observes that the genealogy of science as described in *The Calcutta Chromosome* and *The Hungry Tide* shows the scientific discoverers of the West, got their fame in the colonized lands. (19) No doubt their inventions are very important in the history of human civilization, but the way these scholars are mentioned in the archival documents without the least mention of any indigenous tradition of knowledge in the respective fields, it seems that these lands were veritable "tabula rasa" regarding scientific discourse before Western colonization. Ghosh, by giving examples which prove the arbitrary nature of scientific discoveries as well as exploring the possibilities of scientific traditions prevalent in the subaltern people of India, substantiates the argument that in India, there was indeed several medical traditions before the colonizers' arrival and because of this practice, the native subaltern who aids the English doctor in the mortuary or in the lab is not as ignorant as s/he is described to be in contemporary English texts.

In this novel, the group of subaltern people who surreptitiously work in order to find a cure for Malaria as well as Syphilis, believe in letting some epistemic detail of the whole body of knowledge remain unknown. They take it as a sacrilege to know everything. This trait reflects a general trend in the Indian body of knowledge at that time. On the other hand, the general notion is that in the Western tradition, any scientific claim stands on solid empirical ground. Precisely, Ghosh here points to the arbitrary randomness of scientific discovery. Murugan narrates a long story in which it is seen that the discovery of malaria parasite in mosquito is a fluke. It can be cited in this context that it is known from Louis Pasteur's biography that he came to invent the medicine

of Cholera by chance. Pasteur had very little to do in the whole process. His lab assistant who actually unknowingly made the whole process happen this way remained unnoticed.

Because of such methodological differences between the conditional understanding of knowledge in Indian and Western systems, the Western scholars, while documenting the history of Indian medical system or for that matter, any other discipline, described it as grossly fantastic. In The Calcutta Chromosome when patients in their last stage of syphilitic dementia, are brought to Mangala, and Farley's prying eyes catch the sight, his quick judgmental reaction to the whole arrangement is that the quackery could not yield anything. (130) Farley is one of those scholars who at the time of judging any aspect of another culture audaciously come to a pejorative conclusion just because of the different cultural context. Any system which they cannot decipher/understand, they label as irrational/ unscientific/ quack. Another difference between the West and the Indian way of thinking is that the discourses were not thoroughly compartmentalised in India. The compartmentalisation of different disciplines was primarily done in Europe. In his interview given to Chitra Sankaran, Ghosh states that European scientists depended heavily on their native informants while compiling the books on natural sciences. (8) He further maintains that following this Indian tradition he too does not believe much in the confining compartmentalisation of knowledge. Even science and religion are not too contradictory two subjects to him. To him, the very notion which motivated J.C. Bose to examine the response system in plants is a concept of advaita. (10) In fact, within his novels, the way Ghosh crosses the generic borders often, he reminds us of the Focauldian doubt about the distinct classifications of discourses. Foucault questions the validity of any distinction between the principal types of discourses. He further affirms that the generic differentiations which are imposed on disciplines like science, religion, and literature are questionable. (*The Archeology of Knowledge*, 22)

Sankaran, in her essay on *The Calcutta Chromosome*, discusses how Ghosh presents a possible alternative of the normativity acknowledged by the Western system of logic. The difference between the Western normativity and the possible Other is so wide that they cannot be assimilated. In this novel, we see that the Other even challenges the linearity of time. Moreover, the certainty which the European system of knowledge implies within the pedagogical frame is also contested. In this novel, Urmila refers to one of Phulboni's stories in which Phulboni describes the discovery of a stone figurine by a drowning woman and the deification of that statute. Later

on, he finds images of the same figurine, portrayed by him in his story, being sold in Calcutta. And these sellers or the potters, he is convinced, do not know about his story. They introduce the image as the deity called Mangala. The myth or story associated with this image, what the seller narrates resembles Phulboni's narrative completely. Thus Phulboni is confused about the inception of the whole idea—his story, or the construction of the Mangala myth. At this point, the moment of inception of this particular story written by Phulboni becomes hazy.

Besides the basic differences in understanding of knowledge in South Asian and Western system, Ghosh also shows that it is not only in the part of the Western scholars that they did not try to understand the multiple layers of Indian culture owing to their ability to assume things about the other, but certain parts of the indigenous cultural body themselves chose to cocoon their identity. In the novel, the subaltern group's illiteracy, their dull look, unimpressive attire collectively work as a veneer covering up their true identity, motive and mission. This condition can be identified as analogous to Joan Riviere's critique of Jacques Lacan's theory describing woman as lacking the phallus. Lacan describes woman as someone lacking the phallus and therefore womanliness is equated to the absence of strength. Riviere counters this theory by depicting womanliness as a mask. She thus introduces a much more complex theme in psychoanalysis by portraying woman as not somebody lacking in something, but as a disguised competitor of man. (Sean,100-1) Ghosh makes his subaltern characters don the same attire of dullness. And when someone like Farley becomes over-inquisitive and tries to poke his nose into these people's activities, they become very alert. When Farley first comes to Cunningham's laboratory, he happens to see a lowly woman in cheap sari and a native man in a laboratory shirt. As usual, Cunningham does not introduce them (Mangala and Lutchman) to him. It evinces the social status they possess at that time. They are not even considered to be worthy of an introduction, but Farley senses that he is being measured by them which gives him an uncanny feeling. As soon as Farley understands that the power equation between the elite and the subaltern (in this case, the British scientist and his native illiterate lab assistants) is not as simple as the elite people think it to be, rather the subaltern people use their subalternity as a veneer behind from which they manipulate the moves of the elite, Farley is killed. At this point, Ghosh shows how the divide between the upper-class urban sensibility and the belief system of the so called rural uneducated mass becomes accentuated when the latter transcends the boundary of Western logic. In another instance, just after Phulboni wakes up after the fateful stormy night, the station master

of Renupur (later who would be revealed to be non-existent) attempts to tell a terrible story associated with the station, but at the same time he observes that Phulboni would not have believed it had he told him earlier: "I tried to tell you but you wouldn't listen…A big sahib like yourself. I can only tell you what people say in these parts: simple village people like myself…" (237) It can easily be noticed how he underscores the cognitive differences between the urban and rural people. The same doubt is reiterated later by the guard of the returning train. While asked by Phulboni why he has not warned him about the notoriety of the Renupur station, the guard almost reverberates the ghostly station master: "I tried to,… But you would not have believed me. You would have laughed and said, "these villagers, their heads are full of fantasies and superstitions." (238) Here the divide between Phulboni and the unreal station master or the guard of the train may be thought to have reached a stage of Lacanian uncanny. Phulboni's job, his Western education have given him a confidence which sounds like almost a bourgeois arrogance that defies anything outside its acknowledged episteme. And the other, in this case the rural uneducated person knows the limit of the urban, and lets the urban one step into that realm of the unknown which he (the urban) normally defies. The exposure pushes Phulboni to a near-death situation. And it "effaces the distinction between imagination and reality." (Dolar, 12) Yet whatever happens or the stories which the guard tells him are not too unfamiliar to Phulboni's imagination. In the whole episode the suabaltern other actually sort of jeers at the narcissistic and exclusive upper class urban culture.

Thus Ghosh demonstrates through the different subplots of *The Calcutta Chromosome* how multiple and widely opposing systems of knowledge may exist in a particular spatio temporal setting. He does not argue against the Western system of knowledge or the post Enlightenment European tradition of logic and knowledge, his warning is against the suppressive doctrine which the carriers of this system of knowledge disseminate later on in different parts of the world. And consequently it destroys indigenous systems. Ghosh actually presents and makes the readers aware about the instances and possibilities of epistemic violence because of cultural encounters. He also warns of the danger of setting a specific normativity because this particular normativity constructs such a reference frame which pushes all the things which do not match with the normative one, to the fringes. He also asserts that the reticence or the silence of the subaltern or the marginal may not always be a sign of their powerlessness. Rather the silence may work as the desired guise of the saboteurs. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Ghosh attempts to present the folk medical tradition not quite like what the hegemonic tradition of the West does.

Coming back to the introductory statement at the beginning of my discussion of this novel, the current measure taken by the Ministry of Health, the Government of India should be regarded as an endeavour to revive the indigenous medical traditions. The Western system of medicine (which is popularly known as Allopathy) is no longer regarded as invasive or alien either by the mass or the government. But the government is proactive to stop the erasure of historicity in the destruction of the indigenous medical traditions which began with the invasive propagation of Western medicine in the colonial period.

Conclusion

Thus, reading these two novels together gives us a picture of how Ghosh understands the journey of science through time. What comes out of *The Circle of Reason,* thus, is that the notion of identity has a confining quality. When a person like Dr. Mishra, is too much conscious about retaining his built up identity, he unknowingly submits to the exertion of this binding force. In order to maintain his identity as a rationalist and a practitioner of science, he opposes the proposal of cremating Kulfi's dead body. Therefore, at this moment, he deliberately relegates the other layers of his identity e.g. an Indian, a Hindu, and above all, a human being. He forgets that this last part of his identity—a human being obliges him to honour the dead. Thus, by depicting the conflict among different parts of people's identity, Ghosh finally shows that in spite of cultural specificities, humanity has a universal appeal.

In the case of *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the protean method of reincarnation through which the primary characters of the secret subaltern cult practicing medicine reincarnate themselves has a unique characteristic. What is retained through this protean change of life is the memory and the legacy of their work and redeemed is the ritual, not the blood. Thus though primarily Mangala Bibi myth generates in a common village of Bengal, the latest reincarnation of the deity is in America. Laakhan, the untouchable village boy is reincarnated in Antar—an Egyptian migrant in US. The bodily incarnations of these characters may be interpreted in two opposing ways. Through these incarnations, they temporally carry on the legacy and agency of the medicinal tradition of the subalterns, but at the same time, the process may suggest a loss of identity. Interestingly, Antar, Maria, Tara—all the futuristic reincarnations of Laakhan, Sonali,

Urmila (who is actually the leader of the cult—Mangala) respectively, can be collectively called a deracinated class, migrating to the first world from the third world.

Notes:

[1] I use this term *Western* because science is a way of thought—a process to bridge between the reality—the practical things and abstract concepts. And the West always tries to point to a few traits in the way of Indian thinking which according to the West, does not adhere to the principles of reason.

[2] Quoted from the Ministry of Ayush, Government of India website

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CHAPTER 3

PROBLEMS IN REPRESENTING THE SUBALTERN: READING *THE SHADOW LINES* AND *THE HUNGRY TIDE*

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak voices her concern about the hegemony of the centre or the elite over the right of nomenclature. The margin, being the current buzzword of academia proves the theory aptly. It is the centre which calls the margin, the margin because they want to hear a voice from the periphery.(Mongia 200) I argue here that in such a case, when the voice is heard according to the discretion of the listener, the listener has the power to control the flow of speech emitting from the speaker. Thus, in the whole process of identifying a particular individual or community as subaltern, the elite has only the power to hegemonize their role as the perpetrator of maintaining the status quo of social order. The danger in it, as Spivak finds, is that a cultural identity is "thrust upon" a particular group. (200) In this chapter, I would discuss how the majoritarian politics of Partition muffled the subaltern people's (both Hindu and Muslim) voice who never wanted to leave their homes. But their understanding of the concept of home to which they have more emotional attachment and less politics, was trivialized in the whirlwind of national and communal politics of pre-Partition India.

In *The Shadow Lines* and in *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh throws light on the lives of the people whose opinions were never solicited either in colonial time or in the postcolonial era. In *The Shadow Lines*, the concept of nation/state and defining people's identity based on that are questioned. On the other hand, in *The Hungry Tide,* through the stories of the refugees who settled in and then were evicted from Morichjhapi island in the Sundarbans, Ghosh depicts the non-empathetic view of the state towards refugees. In this novel we see how their notion of home is again literally bulldozed by the state. Ghosh also portrays the hushing up of several environmental issues for the corporate interest of modern state politics. In consequence, the people who suffer most are the South Asian peasant community. As their livelihood is directly dependent on the environment, global warming and other environmental crisis put them in a serious existential crisis.

In the following two sections of this chapter, I shall discuss these issues against the background of these two novels.

The Shadow Lines

The Shadow Lines (1988) is Amitav Ghosh's second novel for which he won the Sahitya Akedemi Award and it is probably his most-read novel in India. In this novel Ghosh situates his characters in such a way that presents a complex dynamics of interpersonal relationships. The complexity arises out of the plurality of one's identities. It is best elucidated in Amartya Sen's Harvard keynote lecture (2005) on identity. Sen argues that "… identity-oriented thinking has to acknowledge our plural identities, and our freedom to decide on the relative importance or the many different groups to which a person belongs." (3) In Ghosh's novel, it is seen that sometimes one or two identities of a person for which s/he finds himself/herself in disturbing situations. These relationships, in this case, owe their complexity to different types of collective identities. Ghosh nudges the readers to consider the extent a person can go to with his/her collective identities, whether these identities can help people in making or prevent people from sharing their feelings with others. He interrogates the attempts to classify human identities into fixed categories, and fragments. This issue is discussed against the background of the unstable political history of the Indian subcontinent.

Identity is a multi-layered concept. Though it has something essentially individualistic in it, it is hard to dissociate a person from the rest of a population and define them without any comparison to others. Rabindranath Tagore discusses in his essay, "Atmaparichay" (Self-Identity), how there are different layers to a person's identity. He observes:

> There is a division in a person's identity. One part is unchangeable and does not depend on the will of the person. This part consists of race, language, family, ethnicity etc. And the other part which is not informed with so much constancy, is what the person earns with his/her intellectual effort—his education, belief etc.

In the same essay, he further maintains, "There is a difference between what I am and what I am not. And one's identity is simply that which states this difference" (Tagore, 1941, my translation).

In *The Shadow Lines,* the complexities, which arise out of such elusive divisions in one's identity, are examined and the trend to frame a person's identity with certain obligatory parameters just because of their difference from others is also problematized. It is most conspicuous in the description of communal riots. It is shown in the novel how such riots take place only because of this mutual exclusion in defining a person, e.g., if a person is a Hindu, he is not a Muslim, and then it is derived, depending on the context (as it happened during the riot in Dhaka in which Tridib, Jethamoshai, and Khalil were killed,) (246), that they are potential conspirators in the theft of the Prophet's hair (a sacred Islamic relic).

Difference is essentially indispensable in one's identity. The central question which surfaces again and again in *The Shadow Lines,* is whether one can go beyond these differences to make a relationship. While a person's identity consists of differences, there is at least one component in one's identity which works to suspend the others: nationality. It is a rather fallacious situation, but it is very much true in the case of the subcontinent. There is no all-inclusive definition of nationalism. Benedict Anderson defines the 'nation' as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 6). Anderson thus underscores the "limited" and restricted nature of the concept: "The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which live other nations."(Anderson, 7; emphasis original). He points out that a nation does not imagine itself as, 'coterminous' with mankind. In the rest of his thesis, Anderson goes on clarifying that nation is not unreal, but the basic condition for the existence of a nation is mostly psychological. Defining nation is quite an elusive task. Whatever definitions the philosophers and historians have offered so far, fall short of explaining the problematical aspects of nation or providing a sufficient definition.

The reason behind the difficulty in defining nation is the subjective nature of the concept; moreover, it varies spatially and temporally. The case is complex in India, as there is no basic tenet in terms of language, religion, culture, cuisine. This complexity is addressed in a few other novels written by Indian or Indian origin authors. Remembering this pan-Indian diversity, Salman Rushdie aptly raises a question in his *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), "Does India exist?" In *Midnight's Children* (1981), a book written a decade before *Imaginary Homelands,* he expresses the same doubt about the solidity of Indian nation-state. India according to Saleem Sinai, the

protagonist of this novel is, “a dream we all agreed to dream,… a mass fantasy shared in varying degrees by Bengali and Punjabi, Madrasi and Jat, …” (130). Rushdie also asserts the constructed-ness in the imagined nature of ‘India’ as a nation-state; the stability of which depends upon agreement among different groups/communities within it on certain parameters. One such parameter is tolerance−respect for the other. In a country like India, where there are multiple languages, religions, and cultures; a person with a particular linguistic, religious, and cultural identity who believes these components of their identity to be superior to others challenges the basic integrity of the nation. It is imperative for one to come out of one’s narrow ethnic/religious or such other community-affiliated identity. A similar doubt is posed in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*: on what basis can a group of people within a specific geo-political border claim themselves to be a part of a nation? Within the broader category of nation, the smaller contesting categories like class, caste, religion, and gender threaten the construct of nation. How these above mentioned categories construct or de-construct the nation, and how on the other hand, nation on a broader scale, is a part of one’s identity which can jeopardize it, are discussed in the following parts of this section.

Communalism/Racism as a Complicating Factor in *The Shadow Lines*

In the Indian subcontinent, the identity factor is complex because religion plays such an important role in the construction of the idea. Anshuman A. Mondal explains this problem succinctlly in his essay, “Looking-glass borders” (2010). He says that though communalism is popularly regarded as nationalism’s *other*, it is actually nationalism’s twin. (Mondal, 101) While the sense of Hindutva was a part of nascent Indian nationalism, Muslim communal identity was cultivated as a foil to this Hindutva and ultimately the development of a separate Muslim identity culminated in a claim for a separate country (Pakistan). In this regard, Gyanendra Pandey observes: “the nation of Indians was visualised as a composite body, consisting of several communities, each with its own history and culture and its own special contribution to make to the common nationality. India…was conceived of as a collection of communities.” (Pandey, 1990: 210) He further states that it is the Hindu-communal solidarity, which used to be identified as the Indian nationality before 1920. Though *The Shadow Lines* was written much after the 1920s, and the time frame it captures was not of 1920s, it does depict some nuanced metaphors in the domestic space

and civil society, which demarcate people on the basis of their communal identities. This novel too, showcases situations when there is a lack of trust between different communities residing in the subcontinent, either in East Pakistan or in India. In Tha'mma's (the narrator's grandmother's) words, as well as in the narrator's conversation with his schoolmates after the riot in Dhaka, it is very much evident, that the majoritarian bent in the thought of the common people.

Tha'mma's infuriated self-assertion—"We have to kill them before they kill us,"(237) comes sometime after Tridib's (the narrator's uncle and Th'amma's nephew) death, when she comes to know about the war between India and Pakistan, is just one such response, which labels a person or a whole community as the other. Though at this stage, she is described as having lost her sanity, her comment mirrors a common trend in the public imagination in reality. Here, she is either not sure herself or she deliberately confuses the religious and national identities of a group of people. "They" does not simply serve the substitutive purpose of a pronoun here, but conceals layers of mistrust and depreciation. "They" may mean the enemy, which is Pakistan, and it may even mean the Muslims who killed Tridib. There are many gray areas as this in *The Shadow Lines,* which are actually mines of unstated ideas. In fact, Tridib's death itself remains a forbidden zone for a long time. The riot in which Tridib was killed, followed the alleged theft of a Muslim holy relic (the sacred hair of Prophet Mohammed,) from the Hazratbal shrine, in Kashmir, December 26, 1963. (The war between India and Pakistan which culminated in the birth of Bangladesh, occurred in 1971.) Here it seems that the arrowhead of Tha'mma's acerbic remark is pointed towards Pakistan−Pakistan is not a nation-state only in this case, but Pakistan stands for the whole Muslim community—the people who killed Tridib during the riot in 1963.

Tridib's death is kept as a mystery almost throughout the entire novel. It's not that no one knows what happened, but the people who know it choose not to divulge it to the narrator. In the same way, the story which the narrator hears from Ila about her humiliation by her school-mates is also an incomplete story. The actual story of Ila's humiliation at the hands of her racist schoolmates remains unsaid till May tells the whole story to the narrator. What is more important in these silences is not what they try to suppress but why they try to suppress at all.

Thus, Ila's humiliation and the cause of Tridib's death, are subjects which cannot be easily broached in a gathering. They are avoided and this avoidance makes them more conspicuous. Louis Althusser's discussion of Marx's writing explains this phenomenon of unsaid words

succinctly. Marx points to the omissions in the formula of standardizing the value of labour given by Classical Economics. Althusser reveals how silences in a sentence voice the obvious.[1]Though Althusser's discussion is on another issue, his theory of silences can answer many questions once applied in the context of socio-cultural-national issues of India. There are many politically sensitive questions or issues which are generally avoided in public discourse in India. In *The Shadow Lines,* the narrator was not told about Tridib's killing by communal rioters in order to suppress the unpalatable truth of communal violence. Communal violence or hatred is such a sensitive issue in the subcontinent, that in civil society it exists as something of a suppressed Freudian memory. That there is a lack of trust between different communities in India, is a fact which the Indians understand but rarely acknowledge because it is politically incorrect to do so. The hatred or distrust towards the *other* community is generally carefully covered in public discourse. However, when something happens (e.g. desecration of certain religious artefacts or the like,) the mistrust or hatred between communities increases to such an extent that the common people are no longer able to conceal it with the fabric of gentility and thus erupts a riot. After Tha'mma's trip to Dhaka, the narrator is sent away from Calcutta to his maternal uncle for some time in order to keep him away from the event of the repatriation of Tridib's dead body. Even when he is brought back, on his way to Calcutta, the narrator is made to promise his father in the Dakshineshwar Kali Temple that he would never raise the issue of Tridib's death: "…you're a big boy, and you have to understand that there are things grown-ups don't talk about" (239). The communal riot is telltale evidence of the many unsuccessfully suppressed issues in *The Shadow Lines.* It seems that it is a people's religious affiliation only, which may trigger such a gruesome bloodshed. The mob in Dhaka, who butchered old Jethamoshai, Tridib, and Khalil (the rickshaw-puller,) apparently did so because the first two persons were Hindu. This agitated mob was demonstrating its hatred for the Hindus, whom it believed were conspirators in the disappearance of Mui-i-Mubarak (the sacred hair of Prophet Mohammed) from HazratBal mosque located in Srinagar, Kashmir, India.

This incident of rioting centers religion as the basis of solidarity. Yet, when religion is considered to be the centripetal force to bind a community together, it is ineffective in some instances. This becomes evident when the narrator makes circles on Tridib's old atlas. When the narrator makes circles on this map of Asia with a rusty compass, he discovers that "Hanoi and Chungking are nearer Khulna than Srinagar…".(227) The narrator is doubtful whether the Muslim

people in Bangladesh would care to think about the mosques of these two places in Vietnam and South China respectively. Thus, religiosity is not always as adhesive as it seems. The narrator comes to realize that religion cannot always connect people from different places. The people who became agitated at the news of theft from Hazrat Bal Mosque in Srinagar, India, may not have expressed such rage had something like this alleged theft occurred at a mosque in Hanoi or Chungking. Interestingly from Dhaka, both Hanoi (Vietnam) and Chungking (South China) are nearer than Srinagar (India) Thus it is clear from these facts that geographical proximity too cannot always elicit a group of people's interest. The Muslim people of Bangladesh felt more connected with the Muslims of Kashmir than those of Vietnam or China.

Religious identity as such, gets complicated when religiosity is coupled with the idea of nationalism. Such intermingling of religious and national identities started in the pre-British era. At the time of building the ideology of nationhood in the subcontinent during the British era, the nationalist discourse rarely addressed any other issues other than the British colonial oppression. During the Muslim rule (Delhi Sultanate or Mughal era), a large faction of Hindu population considered the Muslims as foreigners and profane. Thus the political tensions between indigenous princely states were often read in the communal lines e.g. the Mughal-Maratha wars. Then during the Raj, the resistance against the British rule generated the anticolonial nationalist movement. The resistance was so much that in 1857, the sepoys (the Indian soldiers serving under the British East India Company), irrespective of their caste or religion, united to rebel against the British and they chose Bahadur Shah Zafar as their prospective monarch. The building up of such a resistance against the British was possible, because the Muslims after all (though initially they had come from outside India), ruled the country from within the country, they did not have a centre outside, but the British were not indigenized the way Muslims were. They ruled under the aegis of the British monarchy which was in England.

After independence, there was no such force or idea against which the different communities could have felt a bond. In reality, there is no common thread which can bind the people living within the geo-political border of India together, because they speak in different languages, have different cultures, different food-habits, practice different religions. Colonial British rule was a force *against* which the people united to fight but after independence, common nationality could not obliterate sectarian antipathy−they did not have reason enough to agree on

one undisputed geopolitical border. Regarding this, the narrator remembers an incident of his childhood.

After Tridib is killed in Dhaka, the narrator senses a charged and uneasy atmosphere in Calcutta. At this time, the narrator has to deny his intimacy with a Muslim friend to his Hindu peer group in school. Ila's experience in England is quite analogous to this. When she is being bullied by some of her racist schoolmates, Nick does nothing to save her. He denies any association with Ila. In both cases, one may find that there are many similarities between the victim and the escapist. These two cases are similar in that, it is the majority's recognition of the minority's otherness, for which the minority is bullied.

Interrogating nationalism as a part of identity South Asian elite and subaltern people in *The Shadow Lines*

Tha'mma, who is an eyewitness to Tridib's killing, suggests a particular trend in a group of people to be the binding factor which unites them as a nation. She gives the example of the English people. She observes that war is their religion and it helped them in building their country. "Once that happens people forget that they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood." (76) Thus according to her, the idea of nationalism may, depending on the situation, trump the other factors of one's identity e.g. race, religion etc. This brings back the issue of building a nationalist ideology when there is no force opposing this process.

Eric Hobsbawm, in his *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780,* analyses the problems of defining a group of people as a nation. Hobsbawm discusses that a nation is not an all-encompassing and continuous entity, but the existence of a nation is felt at certain "intersections" e.g. politics, technology, economics. Hobsbawm's disappointment in such a system lies in the fact that, even when the idea of nation is infused in these intersections, the process is conducted from above and adequate attention is not given to the ordinary people (e.g. their choices and understanding) (9-10). Later, in the essay, "The Government Perspective," he discusses that the "emotional component" which is responsible for "state patriotism," is essentially local. The philological nuance of the word "pays" or "patrie" – meaning, a country where one was born, conveys the idea more clearly. Hobsbawm quotes J.M. Thompson in this regard, "A Frenchman's

country was merely that part of it in which he happened to be born," (90) This sense of locality is not true for a Frenchman only, it is very much true for a person in the subcontinent as well. Though Tha'mma, advocates for a larger scheme of national unity which temporarily obliterates the racial and cultural disparities, she herself would often come back to in her memories of her home in Dhaka.

There is a type of specificity in such localism, which does not fit exactly with the idea of nationalism. This specificity adds to one's identity. There may be a possibility that to embrace nationalism, a person may have to forsake that local component in his identity. Nationalism asks for a cultural uniformity which is difficult to attain in a pluralistic society. In this regard, Ernest Gellner describes nationalist ideology to be informed with, "false consciousness." He writes: "Its myths invert reality: it claims to defend folk culture while in fact it is forging a high culture; it claims to protect an old folk society while in fact helping to build up an anonymous mass society" (Gellner, 2008: 120). This is why in a pluralistic society, as it is the case in India, some communities feel the unifying nationalist force unduly encroaching upon their identity. The many claims for having separate nation-states that often erupt here and there in India, specifically in the North Eastern part and a few other states in North India, display this notion of encroachment. Tha'mma's solution to overcome such dividing forces, is to forget about the distinct differential identities.

Ashis Nandy chronicles a part of a counter discourse of nationalism in his essays on Tagore (anthologized as *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism*)[2]. While discussing Tagore's thoughts on nationalism, Nandy writes that the people who took a stand against nationalism were themselves divided. Tagore, he describes as a dissenter among these dissenters. One set of the dissenters was against nationalism as they voiced their opinion for a universalism that would overlook any sort of loyalty towards class, caste, ethnicity, community etc. On the other hand, the second set of dissenters argued that universalism was a Western idea, which could not be fitted, in Indian context. India was a land of many communities, cultures, and languages. They had a strong approval for the essentially plural character of Indian civilization. What Tagore dreaded most in the germinating discourse of nationalism was the steam-rolling momentum of its force. The freedom of human beings was of more value to him. Not oblivion, (as Th'amma prescribes in *The*

Shadow Lines), but Tagore suggests, that it is thorough the acknowledgement of differences, that India should attain its unity. (Nandy, 6)

In the plural society of the Indian subcontinent, British rule acted as a catalytic agent in the formation of nationalist ideology. Moreover, nationalism filled the ideological emptiness felt by the middle class Indians. Tha'mma is a representative of that section. Though she is described as having struggled for a decent life after her husband's premature death, before her marriage, it is the small tasks like conveying messages between extremist nationalists, which give her the feeling of taking part in an adventurous movement. Subscription to the nationalist ideology was, for many, an adventure in their otherwise rippleless lives.

Only during the British rule did India have a truly centralized administration in its history as B B Misra emphasizes in his book, "…the degree of administrative rationalization during this (British) period of bureaucratic despotism was far ahead of the country's Brahmnic social order which knew no rule of law in the contractual sense (Misra, 88). The spirit of nationalism emerged as an opposition to it, but it was the Western idea of secular nationalism, which influenced the formation of Indian nationalism. Literature was one among the many spaces in which nationalistic ideals were practiced. Besides a great number of books written in vernacular, books were written in English at this time which were infused with nationalism (e.g. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*). It is debated nowadays whether the same tradition follows at the present postcolonial times as well.

In his essay on the third-world literature, Fredric Jameson comments in the most unqualified way that "All third-world texts are necessarily…" (1986:15) nationalist in nature. Aijaz Ahmad strongly opposes this stand in his essay, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and National Allegory." He argues that labeling all the literature written in the postcolonial era as nationalist allegories, just because these nations have colonial and imperial experience, is an example of "positivist reductionism" (78). There are many moments in *The Shadow Lines* which evince Ahmad's argument that every third-world writing, is not necessarily a nationalist text. Rather, Ghosh shows in this novel, how one's nationality can land one in odd situations. The characters of Ghosh's novel, Tridib, May, Tha'mma, Ila, and Nick found themselves in situations where their identities were severely tested. Some of the characters, such as did May and Tridib, who inhabit Ghosh's novel transcend that border of nationality. In his letter of invitation to May, Tridib wishes to meet her at a ruin so that they could overcome the historical, political, and national

barriers between them (144). They stretch themselves far enough to cross the border. The borders of nationality blur for them and they discover themselves to be a part of the whole human race. On the other hand, some of the characters, such as Nick and Th'amma, remain closeted in their smaller 'national' identities, and could never cross the border of nationality or religion. At the time of Ila's harassment at the hands of her schoolmates, Nick does not do anything to rescue her. His inaction is indicative of his support for the partisan tormentors. For them, the border is barbed.

Ghosh also shows how the assumed homogeneity of Indian nation is at stake in the face of cultural difference. In fact, the difference is not only cultural; it has a lot to do with socio-political, historical, and economical aspects. Most of the characters of this novel−Tha'mma, Ila, the narrator, Robi, and Jethamoshai belong to the same extended family, but they have different notions about nationhood. The varied stances of the characters on nationhood and identity in*The Shadow Lines,* can be explained in the line in which Homi Bhabha interprets Julia Kristeva's study of nation as a liminal space, "The borders of the nation Kristeva claims, are constantly faced with a double temporality: the process of identity constituted by historical sedimentation (the pedagogical); and the loss of identity in the signifying process of cultural identification (the performative) (Bhabha, 216). This type of situation can be precisely explained with the case of Tha'mma. She was born in British India and it is quite evident in the novel that she grew up with a feeling of bondage. The contemporary political narrative also contributes to such a feeling. And with the departure of the British, and the Partition, she becomes a citizen of independent India. She undergoes many transformations, both internal and external as a result. She becomes a citizen from a subject. In the British colonial era, all the natives of India were categorically the subjects of the British monarchy, and then when India achieved its independence, they became citizens of a sovereign country. Thus Th'amma's status also changes from a subject to a citizen.

To make matters more complicated, the place of her birth, Dhaka—where she has her ancestral home as well, becomes a part of another country. That too, has a deep impact on her psyche because the Partition makes such a territorial dislocation deeply disturbing. Therefore, on one side, she gets a new political identity− citizenship in India−and on the other, there is a loss in the psychological attachment she has with her place of nativity.

Problematizing the cultural factor and gender question in relation to nationalism

The unnamed narrator in *SL* is Indian by birth, and with his authorial omniscient view, he describes the lives of others in the novel. The description covers a long journey, as he grows from childhood to manhood, and moves from Calcutta to Delhi and then to London. Ila, whom the narrator describes as his mirror image, considers herself a citizen of the world. On the issue of nationalism Ila and Tha'mma together form a perfect binary. Ila never seems to be obsessed with her Indian origin at all. At times, she is rather eager to shed the national-cultural tag from her identity. When in a five star hotel in Calcutta Robi, her uncle forbids her to dance with a stranger, she responds by violently voicing her opinions about nationality, which include cultural taboos:

> Do you see now why I've chosen to live in London? Do you see? It's only because I want to be free.
>
> Free of what? I said.
>
> Free of *you*! She shouted back. Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you. (emphasis original; 88-89)

No doubt, it is an outburst of frenzied anger. Through Ila's statement here, Ghosh compels the readers to question the bounds of nationality. In the name of Indian culture, women are barred from doing a few things which men are not prohibited from doing. Thus, in the construct of nationality, gender-bias (that too is practiced in the name of culture,) plays a role. Ila finds it too claustrophobic to live up to the popular gender-based restrictions in Indian culture because she loves her freedom. Her marriage with Nick is probably an effort to realize the cosmopolitan identity she was always in search of.

But Tha'mma interprets Ila's search for agency, as a "whore's" illegitimate desire:

> It's not freedom she wants…She wants to be left alone to do what she pleases: that's all any whore would want. She'll find it easily enough over there; that's what those places have to offer. But that is not what it means to be free. (89)

As Tha'mma is an uncompromising disciplinarian, she considers anything wrong if it does not fall into the tight compartments of her understanding. She was born and brought up in British India. At that time, the home, especially in the middle-class cross-section of society, was the ideal space for exercising nationalist ideals. In his essay, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonized Women: the Contest in India", Partha Chatterjee lucidly explains the effectiveness of the "woman's space" in the making of nationalist ideology. According to Chatterjee, the nationalist, in order to reinforce the Indian-ness in their identity, took pains to demarcate the public and the private. The public realm which deals mainly with the material aspects of life, were the domain of the male. This space was irretrievably contaminated by the colonizers—their education, language, and many items of creature comfort (Chatterjee, 1995: 625). Though one cannot virtually do away with this part of life, in Indian culture, the material aspect of life, is considered less important. The spiritual realm is considered the truly important part of life and it is unchangeable. The spiritual inheritance is carried on within the home. So home, according to the nationalist thinkers and politicians, should not undergo any change, and the custodian of this home, which is the woman, should also remain uninfluenced. Mahatma Gandhi too observes the less dynamic nature of the Indian women in a rather congratulatory mode, "Women are special custodians of all that is pure and religious in life. Conservative by nature, if they are slow to shed superstitious habits, they are also slow to give up all that is pure and noble in life."(1980: 2) Therefore, born and brought up in such a time, Tha'mma has been conditioned to consider a woman as a symbol of domestic benevolence. It is true that she is not a full-time housewife and she has worked as a school-teacher in Calcutta. Before the death of her husband, she never worked outside. During the germination of the nationalist movement, women's role was pinpointed as the care-giver. Women did take part in the Satyagraha, or other mass movements, but their primary field of work was within the home. Again it is emphasized by Gandhi that women should concentrate more at home, "In a well-ordered society, the additional burden of maintaining the family ought not to fall on her. The man should look to the maintenance of the family, the woman to house-hold management, the two thus supplementing and complementing each other's labours" (Gandhi, 1934). Though the expectation that the women should be temporally static embodiments of the purity of a culture has a distinct patriarchal influence, there are women who believe in this idea and Th'amma seems to be one of them.

Now Tha'mma, who is a believer in this ideological stance, could never understand Ila because she does not fit into either of these two prescribed models of Indian womanhood. She

may be described as what Zygmunt Bauman termed a, "nomad of modernity"(23-24). She does not have any special feeling for inheriting the Indian genealogy, nor is she the benevolent woman of the household space. Though she is a daughter of Indian parents, she has spent her childhood in many different countries. Her upbringing differs from Tha'amma's and thus, the difference in their perceptions. This belief that women are naturally conservative purists, stokes the age-old nature vs. nurture debate. What is claimed to be natural in these women has actually been nurtured in them. Ila is not considered an ideal Indian woman by Tha'mma or Robi (Tridib's brother and Ila's uncle) because the so-called Indian traits have not been inculcated in her. She has travelled frequently outside of India and therefore, has not come into contact with Indian society long enough to be influenced by its characteristics.

In this context, Ila's protest against her surrounding is doubly layered. First, she is against the assumption that women are designated to be the custodians of the cultural traditions of a particular ethnic group. Her grudge against this assumption is deep-rooted and is partly because of the ostracization she faced from the peer group in her childhood because of her Indian origin. And secondly, her protest is against patriarchal oppression. The template of femininity, which Tha'mma believes in, and which was promoted by the nationalist politics, also produced the imagery of India as a mother figure. This production of an imagery, which was very much political with certain religious affiliation, entered the domestic sphere too. It demands every female to reflect the benevolence and endurance a mother is supposed to possess. Thus, the entrance of a political symbol into the domestic deeply influences the identity of women. They have an ideal to look up to and to become like. Partha Chatterjee explains in the above mentioned essay, how the dichotomy of the home and the public sphere produces the desired mechanics of the anticolonial nationalist mass movement in India. Almost all the political nationalist leaders of the time were educated in the British system. The political leaders, because of their education in the British system, were influenced a lot by the Western thinking and philosophy. Thus in their rationality, philosophical bent, even in their nationalist thinking, they carried on the legacy of British education, which again, was a part of Western culture. Frantz Fanon's observation in this context gives quite the picture of what Indian males felt about their cultural position in the colonial era, "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it" (170). Thus, in conjunction with Chatterjee's essay, it can be inferred that in this

scenario, Indian women, being almost uneducated or sparsely educated, and having remained behind the purdah so far, were considered to be least influenced by the British colonial system. The home remained the ideal site for the practice of nationalism. Ila rebels against the continuation of this practice even when there is no such necessity to use women's space as a site of nationalist culture.

Place and historicity as components of one's identity in *The Shadow Lines*

The differences between Ila and Tha'mma are the result of how they construe the meanings of the borders in their lives. Tha'mma's strong sense of maintaining borderlines everywhere, deepens her belief in the cartographic rigidity of different nations. On the other hand, in her peripatetic childhood, Ila faces the restrictions of borders only at the ports of entry of International airports. Moreover, Ila is averse to allowing nationality to get into her way. For Tha'mma, freedom means the right of the people of a land to govern their own land; she has no experience of restriction, other than the limitations imposed by foreign rulers. For her, there could be no other legitimate form of freedom. Moreover, she believes in the neatness of being within the bounds of the specific geo-political border. According to her, Ila is an outsider in England because by living there she dares to cross the border marked by her nationality. Ila's decision to stay in England is sacrilege in Tha'mma's opinion. But ironically, Th'amma finds herself in an insoluble jeopardy, when she thinks about filling in her disembarkation form at Calcutta airport before she takes the flight to Dhaka. Her place of birth is Dhaka while her nationality is Indian. Thus Ghosh here portrays how the sense of territorial dislocation plays an important role in shaping one's consciousness of being a member of a race or a nation. Tha'mma is once surprised at the suggestion of the absence of any concrete physical borders between two countries, "surely there's something – trenches perhaps, or soldiers, or guns pointing at each other, or even just barren strips of land" (151).

Tha'mma's confusion stems from her belief that a country should have a concrete border, and more importantly must have a border. Now she finds that the city of her childhood, which is indelibly charted out in her mind with all its lanes and by-lanes, is in another country across the border. Before going to Dhaka from Calcutta, Tha'mma always remembers the place fondly. She finally goes to Dhaka in order to visit her birth-place, as well as to bring her novogenerian uncle to Calcutta. In fact, she is even not sanguine about which verb "going" or "coming" she should use while taking a journey to Dhaka. So much is her attachment to the place. But Tha'mma's

thought of girdling a country with a border is replete with a jingoistic frenzy. She scoffs at Ila's staying in England because she aggressively supports the idea of maintaining the sanctity of borders, be it her own country or the country of India's ex-foreign rulers: "Ila has no right to live there…She doesn't belong there. It took those people a long time to build that country, hundred of years, and years of war and bloodshed… They know they're a nation because they have drawn their borders with blood" (77-78). She even tries to legitimize Ila being attacked by her racially biased British classmates; saying that she ought to tolerate such attacks as she does not belong to that country. Thus, Ghosh shows yet again, how an apparently positive-looking force like nationalism can generate a sense of difference and hatred in people's minds. In her youth, Tha'mma has defined her sense of nationalism by her aversion towards the British and in her old age her love for her own country (India) becomes more of a hatred for another country (Pakistan).

The tension, which develops between either Ila and Tha'mma or Ila and Robi springs from the cultural fixity which is indelibly written on their mind. They are not in a position to accept culture or Indian culture as hybrid. Robi may consider the problems with a totalitarian stance on nationality later in his life, but for Tha'mma, everything has a fixed code. Ila is at the epicenter of this familial commotion regarding culture and may not be as liberal as she poses to be. Held against Robi or Tha'mma, Ila's position seems to be what Homi Bhabha explains in one of his interviews titled "The Third Space" as "anarchic liberalism" (213). The loss of sovereignty of the self, which according to Bhabha, facilitates one taking a culturally non-assimilationist stance, leaves no room for any kind of fixity. In Ila's case, there is nothing wrong in her wish to live in London, but being a woman of Indian origin complicates her experience and views. She wants to jettison the Indian part from her identity and to embrace universalism. Claire Chambers discusses in her Ph.D. dissertation, how Ila is biased by a Western sense of historicity when she claims that what happens in India−the riots, famines, etc.−are mere local things and the *real* history is the history of "revolutions and anti-fascist wars" (Chambers, 2003: 91). Thus it seems that interpersonal tension arises from such fixities in mindset.

Examined against Tha'mma or Ila's opinion, Robi's stand looks comparatively balanced. He could think of how many fluctuations there could be in the definition of freedom. When Robi describes his experience of working as an administrative official in a certain district of India, he sheds light on the concept of nationalism and freedom from a different angle. He says that if there

were any mass-killings or disasters caused by militants within his province, he would have certainly ordered his police-force to shoot at sight because those are supposed to be divisive forces, which pose a threat to national integrity. But when Robi tries to think the issue from the point of view of those people whom the state has marked as terrorists, he finds that it is impossible to define 'freedom' with some fixed parameters. Incidents of insurgency or other forms of political subversion are not rare these days. But the killing of the insurgents, be it in India or in Sri Lanka or in any other country, for that matter, creates problems of definition because many of the insurgents call themselves 'freedom fighters'. They believe that the state is encroaching on their freedom. In this way, Ghosh shows that the meaning of freedom is relative, be it on a domestic level or larger political level. For example, Ila wants to flee from the patriarchal *Indian* culture or Tha'mma's imagination of a neat geo-political border, which ascertains the freedom of a country. This situation can be compared to the suppression of any sort of political (emancipatory) mobilization against a governing state's rule; the state is always coercive.

Another concept of national border, is raised by Jethamoshai (meaning 'uncle' in Bengali) in *SL*. At Tha'mma's suggestion to move to India from Dhaka (as the city is no longer in India,) he reminds her of the fact that one may find themselves in a no man's land once they starts moving:

> Move?...Once you start moving you never stop….I don't believe in this India- Shindia. It's all very well you are going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. (215)

Ghosh, titillates a very delicate issue regarding nationalism. Here he shows that the borders are in the minds of people, and this is why the sense of border tends to spill over into different areas. This old man who has seen the drawing of the border, though within a house, perhaps understands the fruitless implication of it. In reference to Jethamoshai's indignation at the proposal of moving, the case of Khalil's father can be remembered. That old man, like Jethamoshai, is said to be against any movement to a different territory meant for the people of his faith. For these people, what matters is the atmosphere they grow old in, not the political sovereignty of the country. Their religious identity is not so imposing as to erase their spatio-temporal sense of rootedness. There are people like Jethamoshai or Khalil's father who did not want their land to be partitioned, but their voice was lost in the majoritarian articulation of nationalism. In fact, this novel seems to

celebrate the presence of "disjunctive time" and space in the process of defining a nation. "Disjunctive time" of a nation, as Bhabha defines in his essay "Dissemination," is a moment situated at the crossroads of different cultural and socio-political realities and pedagogies. (Bhabha 204) At the same time, Ghosh gives a subtle hint of danger in the process of homogenizing the nation. The danger in this process, as Bhabha argues in his famous essay "Dissemination" is the audacity of refusing to acknowledge the individuality of each person, "In the metaphor of the national community as the 'many as one', the one is now both tendency to totalize the social in a homogenous empty time…the less- than- one that intervenes with a metonymic, iterative temporality" (Bhabha, 218)" Thus, it seems that the voice of the individual is lost in the cacophony of many.

For Tha'mma , Jethamoshai, and Ila, experiences with border courts−border courts disputes, border court fears and alienation−produce anxiety regardless of whether they believe in borders or not. In spite huge cultural and racial differences between them, Tridib and May (Tridib's beloved who lives in London), are capable of transcending those borderlines. May is the daughter (Nick is her brother) of the Prices, who are friends of Tridib's parents. They fall in love with each other without seeing each other. They start writing letters to each other and in this course of transcontinental correspondences between Calcutta and London, there forms a relationship. It is a literal crossing of borders in addition to cultural, political, and colonial borders. When they begin the relationship, the history of British colonization in India is quite fresh.

Ghosh proposes this capability of going beyond one's circumstantial limits as an alternative force, which could be a positive substitute for narrow nationalism. Tridib compares himself with Tristan (the hero of the Arthurian romance—"Tristan and Iseult,") who fell in love with a woman across the sea. May reciprocates that love coming halfway to meet him. While Tha'mma makes her discourse on retaining borders, Tridib tells the narrator how to transcend those imaginary borders through desires. He tells the narrator that only through feeling the primitive desires in oneself, can one transcend his/her circumstantial borders. Such desires require one, "to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror" (29).

Tridib tells the narrator how to transcend those imaginary borders through desires:

…one could never do 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 flesh that carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places, and if one was lucky to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror. (29)

Tridib allows full play of this desire into his life, by loving May, who is a British woman, and then, attempting to rescue old Jethamoshai from the violent mob. Later, May realizes that Tridib dies because he could go beyond his limits. At that moment of action−of jumping out of the car into the rioting mob−, Tridib does not think about the limits of his vulnerability e.g. his religion. He must have thought that he would be attacked because he is a Hindu, and the rioting mob was Muslim, but what was at the forefront of his mind, was the urge to rescue another human being. To him, the relationship between two human beings is uppermost and that relationship should not be determined by the socio-cultural-national positions of the two people in question. May's works, and fund-raising program to provide food for the famished people of Africa are motivated by the same feeling. This feeling leads her to think for others beyond her national barriers.

To draw a conclusion, it can be inferred that by portraying so many characters with different mindsets about nationhood, Ghosh demonstrates how difficult it is to define a person's identity with some fixed parameters, especially when the person is from a pluralistic society of a third-world nation with a colonial history. *SL* does not criticize the community-affiliated part of one's identity, nor does it paint the idea of nation-ness in any disagreeable hue, but the necessity to accept individuality of a person emerges triumphant in the book. The picture the readers are given in this novel depict how narrow communal propaganda could fan the latent bloodthirstiness of a mob. At the same time details of the, minute subtle interpersonal tensions working within a family, or even a married couple, reveal the cause of such tensions to be cultural or national differences. The novel warns about the danger of viewing a person only in respect of their nationality or religious identity. It tells a person's identity is not confined by one kind of border− political, cultural, or national. In fact, freedom which is quite a loaded word in the context of those places of the world which have a colonial past, has been problematized as a concept. Freedom cannot always be as simplistic as the nationalist ideology prescribes, nor is it always collective. All of the characters in this novel—the unnamed narrator, Ila, Robi, Tha'mma, etc., are in a way

locked within their respective memories. Each of them has some painful part of their lives, which they could never erase. While defining the idea of nation, the concept of freedom is significant in the context of the Indian subcontinent, as India (along with Pakistan and Bangladesh,) has its distinct and official geo-political entity as a nation, only after the independence from the British rule. Freedom then, becomes a crucial factor in the definition of nation.

The Narrator's making circle in a childlike game or the wish of Khalil's father or Jethamoshai's insistence on not moving are examples through which Ghosh not only shows that the elitist politics of the subcontinent makes very little room for the subaltern's voice, but by showing the defiance of the subaltern in these acts of ignoring the verdict of Partition, he throws light on the parallel political consciousness of the South Asian subalterns, claimed by Subaltern Studies.

The Hungry Tide

The Hungry Tide is Amitav Ghosh's fourth novel. Divya Anand observes that Amitav Ghosh is the first Indian author to have addressed the ecological issue in English fiction with the publication of *The Hungry Tide* (2004). (22) Here it should be noted that Arundhati Roy does touch upon the emerging trend of destroying natural resources in order to build tourism infrastructure in her *The God of Small Things* (1997), but this issue has not been addressed the way it is addressed in *The Hungry Tide*. Shakti Jaisingh reads this novel as a problematization of the existential crisis of the South Asian peasant life at the face of neoliberal aggression. In this section of Chapter 3, I attempt to focus on the aspect of the voice of the subaltern in the politics of development versus the ecological question. The subtle complexity of this politics is gradually unraveled through different stories in the novel. But more importantly, in course of telling those stories, the problem of agency never goes out of the discursive focus—to be more precise the perspective of the narration is constantly interrogated. The problem surfaces more prominently in the novel in reference to Nirmal's journal. That the advantageous position of the author entails the possibility of ideological influence over an ethnological testimonial is also hinted at here.

Besides the problem of the people, the very place—the Sundarbans is presented as a site of contestation in *The Hungry Tide*. Lisa Fletcher discusses the historicization of the Sundarbans in *The Hungry Tide* as a congruous topic in the discourse of island studies. In her works on the Sundarbans, Annu Jalais shows how the Sundarbans has undergone several transformations in terms of definition from the colonial period until now. What in the British colonial period was considered to be a mere wasteland producing no revenues has gradually taken on significance as a site chosen by the World Heritage Site Committee in order to preserve the flora and fauna of its eco-system. In the long process of the Sundarbans' graduation as a geographical place to a space of political dispute and ecological concern, the people who have inhabited in some of the islands, rarely get any recognition. It is observed that the marginalisation of these people, some of whose ancestors had settled here as early as 1765, and the others who came as late as 1970 as a post-Partition effect, has been consistent throughout this centuries-long period. Contrary to other places the conditions in which these people live have been always poor and underdeveloped.

Examining development as a statist propaganda

The reality of the marginalization of the human population in the Sundarbans is evident from this fact that the reference of these people as inhabitants of the Sundarbans comes at the end of the long list of different species of plants and animals made by Hunter in 1875. (Jalais, 5) He refers to them as a "few wandering gangs". The colonial tradition has been being carried on into the postcolonial period as well. These marginal people are continuously being pushed to the fringes, sometimes in the name of wildlife preservation as it happened at the time of the Morichjhanpi Massacre, or sometimes at the name of development. (The Morichjhanpi massacre or incident is known to be a notorious mass killing of low-caste Bengali Hindu refugees from East Pakistan by the Left-led Government of West Bengal in May, 1979 at the time of forceful evacuation of the refugees from Morichjhanpi—an island declared as reserve forest in the Sundarbans, but the government never acknowledged of any such incident.) The definition of development is ambiguous, and the Government uses all the available powers of an establishment to act and reap the opportunity of the ambiguity of this very word. In today's context, ecological reservation too has gained multiple layers of meanings and implications. In recent past it was seen that the Government and the local adivasis had opposing opinions regarding the mining of

bauxite at Niyamgiri hills region in Odisha. In this case, against the Adivasis' protest that mining at this region would destroy the forest, water, nature and hurt their communal belief, the Government claim that their commitment to development is progressive. Here it is worthwhile to problematize the very concept of development. Development, according to Gustavo Esteda:

> always implies a favourable change, a step from the simple to the complex, from the inferior to the superior, from worse to better. [It] indicates that one is doing well because one is advancing in the sense of a necessary, ineluctable, universal law and toward a desirable goal. (10)

The idea of development thus, even today, bears the legacy of the civilizing mission of colonial times. Most of the time, it is the lowest rung of society which is the target of the mission of development but the effort of the government only trickles down to them. The downward gaze of the development policy-makers entails the possibility of glossing over the essential problems of the marginal. Partha Chatterjee discusses that development is regarded "as a process affecting the whole of society" and "it was premised upon one consciousness and will —that of the whole." (emphasis original, 247) Thus the very idea of development renders the state a rational consciousness which it owns on behalf of the entire population. Naturally the multiple differences of needs among the population is not addressed in this process. Araturo Escober demonstrates this feature in the idea of development, which in his book he aptly puts thus:

> Development was – and continues to be for the most part—a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach which treated people and culture as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of progress. (44)

In his essay, "The Making and Unmaking of Third World through Development" he elucidates the argument further. According to him, development has been functioning as a discourse ever since the advent of Enlightenment initiated modernization. This discursive system "sets the rules of the game; who can speak, from what points of view, with what authority, and according to what criteria of expertise …"(87) Thus it can be seen how in the case of Niyamgiri, the state tries to encroach upon the land in the name of "development". On the other hand, during the Morichjhanpi incident

(or prior to that) the Government was against any settlement on the island because they were intent on preserving the forest areas and the tigers.

Thus, in the age of Capital, the state always shifts between two extreme positions of pro-nature and pro-development, according to the sway of the Capital. In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh not only reveals the deceptive stand of the government, but the progressive façade of the urban Bengali bhadralok section is also exposed. This part of Bengali society that proclaims to be progressive, educated, and sensitive, actually winks at the misery of the marginal people. Besides the ecological issue, Ghosh points to the porous nature of the walls separating different ideological stands e.g. humanist/nonhumanist, elite/subaltern, government/ non-governmental philanthropy etc.

The subaltern and the ethnographer's problem of perspective

The "subaltern in the Subaltern Studies" Prathama Banerjee argues, is "an invented category." As no one claims it to be his/her label, it has always been used to label one particular sect of society or the other in the discursive field. Sometimes the term 'subaltern' refers to the peasants, sometimes the refugees, sometimes the women, and sometimes the Dalits. (Banerjee, 39). Subaltern studies has been always engaged with the mechanics of power, knowledge, and obviously, language. It is the elites who designate the subalterns as 'subalterns'. The ensemble of various characters in *The Hungry Tide* creates a space for interaction between different economic classes of society as Ghosh draws his characters from different socio-economic and cultural levels of society.

The narration is presented chiefly through the perspectives of Piya and Kanai. What is noteworthy here is that Piya and Kanai—both were from the affluent portion of society though they have vastly different cultural background. Thus Ghosh shows how the problem of the subaltern is looked at by the elites of the society. Piya or Piyali Roy was born in a Bengali family but as she grows up in Seattle and her father does not encourage her to learn Bengali because he thinks that the retaining of a separate linguistic identity is a baggage for an immigrant which hinders his/her assimilation in the mainstream. Thus when she comes to the Sundarbans, she feels herself a stranger among her own people. Her father has the progressive look befitting an ideal immigrant:

> He believes that Indians—Bengalis in particular—don't travel well, because their eyes are always turned backwards, towards home. When we moved to America, he decided he wasn't going to make that mistake: he was going to try to fit in. (*The Hungry Tide*, 250)

She comes to the Sundarbans to conduct her research on Orcella (river-dolphins). An unwanted accident brings her to Lusibari. Kanai too belongs to the same economical strata as that of Piya. He is a linguist who runs a translation agency in Delhi and makes a lot of money. He has come to Lusibari following an invitation from her aunt Nilima to claim a journal left by her uncle for him.

At a glance, the two choices of characters (Piya and Kanai) as the medium between the happenings of the novel and the reader may seem bizarre because the novel is situated in such a place, the Sundarbans, where the local people were not known to be rich, educated, and powerful. They rarely have a voice for their own issues in the Governmental discourse. In choosing Piya as a narrator Ghosh allows himself a flexibility to document certain minute details which he could not otherwise have done. Her American upbringing and ignorance about the local culture, and obviously the language (Bengali) give Piya an almost innocent point of view. Every small thing she views, be it the crab line used by Fokir, or the make-shift arrangement to take a bath in Fokir's boat elicits curiosity mixed with some amount of surprise in Piya because she is an American. She cannot feel curious and express her own thought about these things without complicating them. Someone who is indigenous and already has some knowledge about these things can never give an innocent account of things the way Piya does. Piya cannot be said to be a pro-subaltern person, but at places she is seen to have felt sympathy for the marginal people in the Sundarbans. Her sympathy might have sprung from her concerns about the river dolphins, the endangered species on which she has been working. Thus when the subaltern question is raised, sometimes it extends to the non-human species too. While giving an account of the government's initiative to save tigers in the Sundarbans, the novel not only cites the authority's negligence towards the human residents of this place, but implicitly raises the question of the lack of any measure to save the Gangetic dolphins.

The other main character, who is the sole narrator of Nirmal's journal, is Kanai. He is a happy-go-lucky man. He has money and he loves to flirt with "interesting" women. On his first

visit to the Sundarbans, although he is a small school child, he has the audacity of a city-bred boy to undermine the rural way of life. On his second visit when he is a 42 year old man, he has lost whatever innocence the small boy had. He apparently has no sympathy for the people of the Sundarbans. Thus Piya's account is placed as a foil to Kanai's seasoned account of all the incidents in the Sundarbans.

Ironically, it is Kanai for whom Nirmal leaves his journal. The writing in this journal was an account of what happens on May 15, 1979, in Morichjhapi. But again Nirmal declares at the very beginning that what he is going to write down would not be his story, but Kusum's. The importance of the voice of the marginalized people lies in the originality of what they say because when they talk (if they can talk) about their life, their problems, they speak about what they feel. It is always a first-hand experience. Manoranjan Byapari, a noted figure in the Dalit tradition of Bengali literature writes that it is not the case that nobody ever articulated the problems of the marginalized, dispossessed people. Rabindranath Tagore, the three famous Bandyopadhyays (Bibhutibhushan, Tarashankar, and Manik), Sunil Gangopadhyay, the group of litterateurs of "Kallol", and "Kali-kalam" also seriously address the issues of the Bengali Dalits but as they are all from the upper-caste society, they themselves never had to go through the plights of the dispossessed. Amitav Ghosh not only addresses the issues of the marginalized people in The Hungry Tide, but he beautifully depicts the problem of a subaltern speech, especially within the governmental discourse. None of the subaltern people within the novel are able to document the hardships undergone (which are unthinkable to an urban middle or upper-middleclass citizen) just to earn the daily wage, or the barbaric way in which the State Government bulldozed the settlers of Morichjanpi island. Therefore, Ghosh has to employ a person from the urban progressive section to tell this history. Nirmal, who is a sympathizer of the causes for the settlers of Morichjhanpi, although he writes about the dire situation of these people, he unequivocally declares in the beginning that it is in their words, the only thing he is doing is the penmanship: "All I need say for the time being, is that this is not my story. It concerns, rather, the only friend you made when you were here in Lusibari: Kusum. If not for my sake, then for hers, read on." (*The Hungry Tide*, 69) A central argument of the subaltern scholars is embedded in this bidding of Nirmal for his nephew. Whose story is told, by whom, and for whom. When a reader reads the accounts of Morichjhanpi by Nirmal, it is through Kanai. Nirmal writes it originally in Bengali. Kanai's version is in English.

And the crux of the problem is that there is a huge difference between Nirmal and Kusum whose story Nirmal claims it to be. Nirmal writes down what he sees on that fateful day, and at times his writing is interrupted by Kusum's direct interjections. There is a danger when one attempts to write down someone else's experience. It has a chance of misappropriation. When there is a huge difference in terms of economic, cultural, and social status between the writer and the subject, the risk of misappropriation increases. Nirmal is an educated, urban Bengali, with a strong Marxist ideology. And Kusum is decades younger than him. She has no institutional education as such, and obviously there is the difference of gender. In such cases, the writer who is documenting may not understand the proper implication of the victim's experiences. And secondly because of the intervention of the ethnographer, there is a loss of immediacy. There are other ethical and political problems in writing such testimonies. The problems are discussed beautifully in the book The Rigoberta Menchu Controversy. David Stoll argues that the narrator (here Rigoberta Menchu) might make a concocted speech in order to garner support of the international media for the Guatemalan guerrilla organization with which she is affiliated. Menchu might be a spokesperson for the Latin American Leftist vanguard. (Arias, 481-505) John Beverly problematizes Stoll's position in his article "What Happens when the Subaltern Speaks". Beverly argues that judging the truthfulness in the speech of the subaltern speaker may not be a very wise idea because there is no universal standard of truth. It may vary according to the culture of the speaker. And when the ethnographer is from a completely different background, then determining the importance and truthfulness in a subaltern's speech entails a risk of being unfairly judgmental. (Beverly, 231) Another probable problem is that the writer, using his superordinate position may control the flow of speech thereby suppressing certain facts. He may manipulate the story in order to establish his own ideology. While reading Nirmal's journal, all these above-mentioned facts should be taken into consideration.

The subaltern question as a dilemma in the imagination of Bengali bhadralok (the educated gentle class)

At the time of writing the journal, Nirmal is in a very ecstatic state of mind. Nilima explains this situation quite precisely when Kanai expresses his surprise about Nirmal's involvement with

the Morichjhanpi incident. She asserts that Nirmal feels sympathy because of the idea of revolution he had always cherished in his youth:

> You have to remember Kanai,…that as a young man Nirmal was in love with the idea of revolution. Men like that even when they turn their backs on their party and their comrades, can never let go of the idea; it's the secret god that rules their heart." (Ghosh, 119)

In his political affiliation, Nirmal is a Marxist. But he is moved more by the romanticism in Marxism. The practicality which is needed to make the dream of revolution come true is not present in him. Losing importance among his comrades in Calcutta, he finds the Sundarbans, or to be more precise, the Badabon an ideal place. This place, according to Nirmal's account, is a place where equality has been practiced from the first day of human habitation. When Sir Hamilton first established a new settlement in the Mangrove forest in the Sundarbans, he invited people to come and settle there, but the invitation was not unconditional:

> Everyone who was willing to work was welcome, S'Daniel said, but on one condition. They could not bring all their petty little divisions and differences. Here there would be no Brahmins or Untouchables, no Bengalis and no Oriyas. Everyone would have to live and work together. (Ghosh, 51)

Egalitarianism is a very fine idea to believe in, but when a group of people who have different cultural backgrounds are compelled to treat each expression of culture on equal terms, it may not be ethically laudatory. It is true that when two communities with different cultures live in close physical proximity for a long time, they begin exchanging their cultural traits. But this is a natural process. And the relation between them may not always be very peaceful too. In this context, Charles Taylor's famous article "The Politics of Recognition" can be noted. According to Taylor, recognition of one's difference, especially by the other might be a precondition of identity. In that way the culture of the minority, or subaltern, or aboriginal, can be recognized by the mainstream people, and that would facilitate the flourishing of the culture in question. Taylor also emphasizes the "rolling back" of colonial rule in order to give the Third World a chance to be themselves. Here the inevitable question which crops up whether it is possible to unlearn the

gestures, or things learnt in the colonial age, or to efface the colonial history from public memory? In fact, Charles Taylor's "presumption of equal worth" has been countered by Homi Bhabha because, as Bhabha alleges, "it focuses exclusively on the recognition of the excluded." (227) Ultimately, the recognition of the other is not always achieved, but through the process of recognition of the other the self also comes to the fore of the discursive ambit.

The case of the settlers of Morichjhanpi becomes conspicuous at this theoretical juncture because they are living a life of exclusion at the time of Nirmal writing the journal. The Government never acknowledges the legitimacy of their settlement. Nirmal's place in the tension between the Government and the settlers is a bit ambiguous. He believes in neat political compartmentalization of everything. And his iconoclastic bent is so strong that he looks down upon Nilima's Government-aided co-operative the 'Badabon Trust". He proclaims himself to be against the Government who, at this point, is synonymous with the capitalist bourgeois for him. But to where does he belong? He is not a subaltern either. Indeed, he has severed his ties with the urban Marxists of Calcutta, and in that way, he is politically marginalized, but that cannot be compared with the state of the hundred thousands of refugees settled in Morichjhanpi. Nirmal is, after all, in spite of his refusal, a representative of the Bengali bhadraloks. On the contrary, the refugees from East Pakistan who have been sent to the Dandakaranya camp by the Government and some of whom later come to the Sundarbans to settle are the chhotoloks. This dichotomy in Bengali society is very important. The bhadraloks are generally the upper-class and upper caste Bengalis, and they are educated too. The chhotoloks are "nimnobogiyo, nimnoborniyo" (as Byapari describes them)—lower-class and lower caste people. Nirmal, definitely a bhadralok, goes to Morichjhapi, in order to experience the zeal of a revolution, and for his love for Kusum. It is a love about which Nirmal has a feeling of illegitimacy and which he can never articulate.

Apparently, Nirmal claims to have a great concern for the well-being of the poor marginalized people of this place, but besides teaching small children and exerting an effort to instill the germ of revolution and equality in others through conversation, he is never seen to have done anything as such to ameliorate the condition of the poor in the entire novel until he writes the saga of the settlers of Morichjhanpi. On the other hand, Nilima, dedicates her life to the poor. It is Nirmal who christens Nilima's public welfare trust "Badabon Trust", but he actually frowns upon

such endeavour which has slightest association with the Government. In fact, initially, he haphazardly takes up the job of teaching in Gosaba, Sundarbans because the settlement was founded by a capitalist (Sir Daniel Hamilton). The thing which deserves reconsideration here in this context, is the difference between the first inhabitants who had come to the virgin jungle at the time of Sir Daniel and the people who lived there when Nirmal and Nilima came to this place. The former ones were the subjects in colonial India, and the latter ones are the citizens. In the latter phase, the Governmental discourse is more wide-spread though it is not always readily visible.

This novel also problematizes the case of widening government space in today's world. it wonderfully showcases an example of what Hardt and Negri calls "Hybrid constitution" i.e. transformation and mixture of different governmental forces. (317) Nilima's Badabon Trust, which works for the welfare of the villagers of the Sundarbans is such an organization. In fact, Nirmal looks down upon Nilima's endeavour for having taken funds from the Government. Here, the "Badabon Trust" is a completely private organization, but its aim is to improve the health facilities of the locality and to empower women economically. Thus it does precisely what a Government of a nation-state is supposed to serve. Here, by funding the NGO and recognising Nilima's effort (through conferring a President's award on her) the state actually channels capital through a way which apparently looks politically benign. Like the NGOs, Hardt and Negri problematise another site of the postmodern society. It is the media. This is a site of expression of the civil society as well as a medium to reach the civil society. (311) At times, it works as the conscience too. Ghosh shows how the media could be the desired site for the subaltern also.

It is true that Amitav Ghosh does not employ a subaltern narrator to tell the stories, rather he cannot as the reality does not allow him to do that. Gayathri Prabhu shows that by employing several micro-narratives Ghosh demonstrate how there cannot be a universal simplified voice of the subalterns. (2) Ghosh also shows that it is not always the philanthropic whim of the mainstream which leads one to document the subaltern's history for them, but sometimes it is the subaltern who consciously wishes for their plight to be recorded. When Nirmal has a tour of the island Morichjhanpi, he congratulates his guide saying that they have luck on their side. The guide apparently believes more in the practical facts of the present than the futuristic assurance of luck.

Their conversation is evident of how self-conscious, a subaltern can be at the time of his exposure to an urban educated person, here a bhadralok:

> At the end of the brief tour, I clasped my guide's hand: 'Destiny is on your side, comrade.'
>
> He smiled and said, 'But still, we cannot succeed without help.'
>
> It was clear at once that he was thinking of all the ways in which I might be of use to him. This impressed me. It was a good sign, I thought, that he was applying his mind in this practical way.
>
> 'I want to be of help,' I said. 'Tell me what I can do.'
>
> 'That depends,' he said. 'What's most important to us at this time is to mobilize public opinion, to bring pressure on the government, to get them to leave us alone. They're putting it out that we're destroying this place; they want people to think we're gangsters who've occupied this place by force. We need to let people know what we're doing and why we're here. We've to tell the world about all we've done and all we've achieved. Can you help us with this? Do you have contacts with the press in Kolkata?' (Ghosh, 172)

Clearly, at the time of an emergency, a subaltern feels that it is necessary to let the world know what s/he has been going through and to gain moral support from them. The unnamed settler of Morichjhanpi here wants to reach the media. The situation is quite analogous to that of Rigoberta Menchu's testimonial. At this point, the subaltern wants to make a speech in front of the mainstream media, and s/he would obviously say what would ameliorate their situation. For the media or the ethnographer, it is difficult to judge the veracity of the things the subaltern speaker makes.

In the next part of the conversation, when the guide gets a negative answer from Nirmal, he asks, 'Then do you know anyone with power? Policeman/ Forest Rangers? Politicians?' Another negative answer makes him lose interest in Nirmal. Thus, it is understood, though it cannot

be generalized, that a subaltern knows the importance of power in special cases. And when he is in a pressing situation he may want to access that power. Before the dubious Government-conducted operation of Morichjhanpi and after it, a great number of articles were published in Bengali (Ross Mullick's is the only one in English). These articles are written by people from various walks of life—poet, journalist, novelist, politican, IAS officer, IPS officer, and even the then chief minister of West Bengal Jyoti Basu. Interestingly, though all these articles deal with the condition of the people in Morichjhapi and the righteousness of Government to conduct a forceful evacuation of the island, they vary greatly in terms of the details. Sunil Gangopadhyay, one of the most noteworthy and popular authors in post-independence West Bengal urges the Government to be sympathetic towards the settlers. He does mention the restrictions with which the Government has to function and acknowledges the difficulty on the part of the government to peacefully tackle this situation, but at the end he wants the government to be more humanitarian. Ashok Mitra, the noted Marxist economist who was the Finance Minister of West Bengal at that time, and Amiya Kumar Samanta (Superintendent of Police) also write articles on the same issue but they never admit that any kind of atrocity has ever been exercised against the settlers. The journalists and free-lance social workers also write articles whose sympathy is for the cause of the settlers but the details vary. In fact, within the novel itself the question of agency is broached. Nirmal, in spite of being from the strata of bhadralok, is not sure about the reception of his journal. Thus when he writes, "You will have greater claim to world's ear than I have.", he admits that everyone, even if s/he is from the elite or middleclass part of the society might not have the authority to speak. By keeping faith on Kanai's ability to publicize the refugees' tragic fate in Morichjhanpi, Nirmal ascertains the necessity of the dissemination of the subaltern's fate and history to the rest of the world. Priya Kumar argues that by portraying the deaths of both Fokir and Kusum, Ghosh forecloses any possibility of subaltern agency, but it may be countrerargued that Ghosh in this novel, tries to situate the subaltern in a position which does not let them have any agency or speak for themselves and it is the elite society which mechanizes such a situation. Even, Nirmal's journal does not have the agency of Kanai's proposed book.

As the perspectives of the afore-mentioned real-life writers vary, in the novel too, the characters have different points of views. Piya's perspective is completely different from those of Nirmal and Kanai. She is more scrutinizing in her visual observation and of the tones in which

words are uttered because she cannot understand the language. After all, the tones are quite similar across the languages. It is not always the words through which feelings are expressed or messages are conveyed, but sometimes silence becomes more meaningful than the words. Ghosh shows through Piya's experience how at times, silence becomes an armour to tackle the indifferent superciliousness of the elites. In her first visit to Fokir and Moyna's residence, Piya asks Kanai if he can make Fokir take part in the conversation as he is very much reticent and it is Fokir to whom Piya is very grateful. Kanai tries to initiate a conversation by telling him that he knew Fokir's mother. But the way he starts his speech, "Ha re Fokir; do you know me? I'm Mashima's nephew" does not work. Here, the very word with which he began his speech "ha re" is indicative of the speaker's low esteem for the person he is speaking to. "Ha re" is a very common word used in domestic conversations in Bengali, but it is rude to address someone who is almost a stranger. In this case, Fokir, instead of continuing the conversation, goes more inside the shell. Here Ghosh also shows that language cannot be a barrier to understand a person's situation. Piya who is also from the elite part of society like Kanai, and in addition to that she does not understand Bengali can clearly perceive what has been exchanged between Kanai and Fokir:

> She hadn't understood what had passed between the two men, but there was no mistaking the condescension in Kanai's voice as he was speaking to Fokir; it was the kind of tone in which someone might address a dimwitted waiter, at once jocular and hectoring. It didn't surprise her that Fokir had responded with what was clearly his instinctive mode of defence: silence. (210)

In fact, Nirmal who is so enthusiastic about the matters of the so called downtrodden and marginalized people, does not actually ever try to look at their life from their perspective. At times, his elitist way of dismissing the subaltern culture is revealed. When Kanai first comes to know about the deity Bon Bibi from Kusum, he asks Nirmal about it. Nirmal's response is dismissive: "Nirmal waved him airily away. 'It's just a tale they tell around here. Don't bother yourself with it. It's just false consciousness; that's all it is." (Ghosh, 101) Nirmal, is, therefore, one of those methodical Marxists despised by Antonio Gramsci who theorize every aspect of the Proletariat culture. Here lies the problem in an elite representing the subaltern. Pablo Mukherjee in his essay on The Hungry Tide points to the same problem. The myths which the marginal people believe in

apparently are ludicrously meaningless to the urban people. In this case, the Bon Bibi myth is about a deity who is believed to be the presiding goddess of the jungle by the local fisher folks and others who have to frequent the jungle for their livelihood. The interesting fact about this deity is that her origin is, as the local people of the Sundarbans believe, Arabia. She along with her brother, Shah Jongoli travelled to the Gangetic delta of Bengal. This place was deep forest at that time and Dokkhin Rai, the god of the tigers had his reign over this place. Bon Bibi and Dokkhin Rai had a fight. Dokkhin Rai lost, but Bon Bibi was so generous that she let Dokkhin Rai have his rule over a part of the delta. According to the treaty it was decided that in Bon Bibi's territory, people would have their habitation and in Dokkhin Rai's part, tigers would have theirs. (Ghosh, 39) Precisely, this is a story of man's fight with nature to claim more space. Like many other mythological stories, it also claims a space in the public imagination and memory. What might be of interest to an urban person without any knowledge about this place and the local culture is the communal syncretism in their beliefs which are almost non-existent in the urban space.

The syncretism in religious practices in this Mangrove area bears a discreet signature of subaltern ideology. Piya hears Fokir uttering "Allah" several times at the shrine of Bon Bibi. Though she does not understand any other word in the prayer, she perceives the mode of the prayer to be a Hindu one. Fokir's religious affiliation is Hindu by birth, but like many other of the fisher-folk community in the Sundarbans, he believes in the greatness of Bon Bibi. And Bon Bibi is not a goddess to be found in the Brahminic Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses. Here this trend exhibits exactly what Gramsci describes about the subaltern's customization of the religion of the elite. According to Gramsci, religion, for the subalterns, does not always work as a false consciousness, but it contributes to their method of rationalizing things in everyday life. (Arnold, 32)

The subaltern and the ecological issue

The subaltern people whether they are the poor fisher-folk of the Sundarbans or the tribal people resisting the "development projects" of the government in many places of India do not think about the sustenance of the ecosystem in the way the people from the civil society think. There is an inherent syncretism in their lifestyle both in regards to the religious matters as well as the

ecology. The Bon Bibi shrine where Fokir returns to again and again is first shown to him by his mother Kusum. He goes there to pay homage to the deity but at the same time the school of sush i.e. the Orcella which frequent this area somehow seem to be the messengers of the deity to Fokir. The kind of religion Fokir and the other people of his community in the Sundarbans practise is in stark contrast with the Brahminical version of Hinduism. Praying to Bon Bibi is one such example through which the religious autonomy is evident among the subalterns in the Sundarbans. It can be referred to here in this context that Ranajit Guha mentions ceremonies to invoke rain at the time of drought and organizing puja to ward off the evil during an epidemic as subaltern practices which they developed on their own, and had not taken a cue from the elites. (Arnold, 41)

The incident of Morichjhanpi is a focal point around which the novel develops. The refugee settlers are evacuated by the Police Force in 1979 in order to protect the mangrove and the wildlife. It is a historical irony that when The Hungry Tide was published, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the West Bengal Government led by the Left (the same political coalition who were in the ruling Government in 1978) and the Sahara India Parivar which is a private corporate agency. Sahara India declared to build a five-star tourism infrastructure in the Sundarbans. (Anand, 29)

Ghosh shows the different modes in the relation between the elite and the subaltern specially when they are in conversation. In his first address to Fokir, Kanai uses "tui", which in Bengali, in such cases are considered to be indicative of disrespect. Fokir always sticks to "apni" indicative of respect, until they reach Garjontola. There Fokir starts addressing Kanai as "tui". (Ghosh, 325) The elite/subaltern divide or the hierarchy of power where elite is considered to be the superior seems relative at this point. Kanai, in spite of his knowledge of six languages, is powerless in the jungle whereas unlettered Fokir knows the tricks to survive in the adversities of a jungle. Apparently in the everyday public domain, Kanai would be considered to have power in comparison with Fokir because the former has knowledge which he derives from his institutional education. Fokir, athough he does not have any academic experience, gains knowledge from his life on the river. The latter one's knowledge may be termed as a form of "subjugated knowledge" (according to Michel Foucault). His knowledge does not get the recognition in the dominant

discourse of knowledge and he knows the ecosystem of the Sundarbans apparently better than the urban educated sect.

Coming back to the Morichjhanpi issue, all the hubbub and government/settlers tension arise because of the ecological issue. The government emphasizes that the jungle is to be preserved at any cost. The novel's stand seems to be slightly oblique regarding this matter and the humanitarian cause has been prioritized. Gareth Grifiths accuses the novel of over-prioritizing human causes, but this novel actually cites an example when nature is destroyed not because of human greed but because of lack of empathy in human beings. The settlers who encroach in Morichjhanpi, a Government territory, without permission, do so because they have no other way to survive. The atmosphere in Dandakaranya is so hostile that they come to the Sundarbans, a place where they can feel at home. If both the Central and the State Governments had been proactive in solving the issue of the Hindu Bengali refugees from East Pakistan, the problem would not have been what it resulted into. The Governments, instead, are known to have reacted ruthlessly. Kanai points out the exact reason of this trend of some people's prioritizing animals over human beings:

> …it was people like you,' said Kanai, who made a push to protect the wildlife here, without regard for the human costs. And I'm complicit because people like me –Indians of my class, that is—have chosen to hide these costs, basically in order to curry favour with their Western patrons. It's not hard to ignore the people who're dying—after all they are the poorest of the poor. (Ghosh, 301)

This is identified as the common practice with the elite society in India. They ignore the problems of the subalterns. In his article "Some Important Words about Morichjhanpi," what Sunil Gangopadhyay writes almost reverberates Kanai's concern about the man versus ecology tension. Gangopadhyay wants the government not to take any coercive step against the refugees in the name of preserving forest. He writes:

> …let the effort to subdue the refugees by Police force be stopped for some time. In the meantime, if a few tigers die, then let them die, if some trees are felled for wood in jungle, then let them be felled. But let the people survive. 67, my translation)

Conclusion

Thus in these two novels, Ghosh presents how the voice of the subaltern, if it exists at all, is caught in the whirlwind of the state, the civil society, and the neoliberal capital at present. It may be quite worthwhile to mention here how Hardt and Negri show in their seminal work Empire, that in the modern empire, there is no Rome i.e. there is no centre which controls everything, but in today's world the controlling force is all pervasive. It is not only the government which decides how things should work. The non-governmental agencies and the corporate sectors with their gigantic purchasing ability can influence many parts of the society. At present, the state is not centrally controlling everything, but the flow of capital is to be found everywhere thereby having a sway of power. For example, in The Hungry Tide, Nilima's co-operative which works for the betterment of the poor people of the Sundarbans is aided by both Governmental and non-Governmental agencies, Piya's research on Gangetic dolphins is funded by an international agency. Hardt and Negri discuss how the NGOs and such organisations work from below while the government works from above. They also assert that "many NGOs serve to further the neoliberal project of global capital." (313) In almost the same vein, in his recent most book The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable, Ghosh discusses how the equilibrium of the environment has been consecutively pushed to the threshold of collapse—first by the colonialism and then by the all-encompassing influence of capital. Ghosh demonstrates how the establishment of the port of Canning in the Sundarbans in 1864 was profusely cautioned by Henry Piddington (a ship inspector by profession and a meteorologist by passion) in 1853, but the colonial administration with their usual arrogant decision-making faculty did not pay heed to that. The consequence was as miserable as it had been warned. (76-78) The ruin of Port Canning is still there to mock the colonial myopic arrogance. In the current situation too, Ghosh observes that there are several coastal cities in the world which run the risk of fatal inundation, but because of the strong real-estate lobby everywhere, any information about the possible meteorological disaster is prevented from circulation. (64) It can be noted here that Piddington was indeed equipped with the pen and was English by birth, but still his plea addressed to the then governor-general was not paid heed to. At that time the colonial state was the power supreme.

The complex network through which power works rarely allows the voice of dissent, if it emanates from the less powerful section of the society, to be heard, even when there is no racial or linguistic barrier as such. Although a specific language as a medium of expression is problematized in this novel, and the linguistic difference between the elite and the subaltern is also showcased, at the same time, it is also pointed out that language cannot be a barrier between two persons with different linguistic abilities. It is evident in the relation between Piya and Fokir. In the novel, Nirmal writes for the refugees, and in reality, an eminent person like Sunil Gangopadhyay writes in support of them. But still their cause is not taken care of. Thus the novel raises the issue of the subaltern's own voice— whether it should have been a subaltern armed with a pen, then he could have put his/her cause more persuasively. Dipesh Chakrabarty comments that Derrida once said that voice was "no guarantor of presence". (Chakrabarty, 16) In this novel, the very question in whose voice the subaltern speaks remains an open-ended question.

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CHAPTER 4

COMMODIFICATION OF LABOUR IN THE AGE OF COLONIALISM AND CAPITALISM IN *SEA OF POPPIES* AND *RIVER OF SMOKE*

Chapter 4 discusses the commodification of labour and the intrusion of capitalism into Indian society in the context of *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*. In these two novels, Ghosh draws a detailed picture of how opium enslaves the entire social system of India, intellectually and economically. In these two novels Ghosh actually tries to draw different facets of the history of opium trade and the Opium Wars.

When one tries to reconstruct a specific moment from the past, to be closer to reality, s/he should use and rely on the extant archival documents. Anshuman A. Mondal observes that in the current discourse most of the historians agree on the point of impossibility of having 'objectivity' in historiography. Although they acknowledge the subjective nature of interpretation of any historical moment, they nevertheless consider the archival information or any documented record to be the credible determiner to judge the accuracy of the interpretation. (Mondal, 140) Poststructuralism intervenes at this very point as it questions the legitimacy of these very evidences to be considered as holistic representatives of the past. By focusing on the socially/politically/sometimes economically marginal characters, by depicting the hardships and nitty-gritties of their every-day lives, Ghosh embeds personal/individual histories in the grand narrative of history. By doing this, he also problematizes history as a discipline.

I would discuss how Ghosh through the portrayal of subaltern characters compels the readers to see many things which are not mentioned in the documented history of opium trade and Opium Wars. We see in these two novels, that the labour force, whether they are the farmers or the workers in the opium factories, are monetarily dependent on opium, and in their leisure hours they use it as a drug. In the *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh depicts the plight of the peasants who are doubly exploited. For compulsive farming of poppies, they go bankrupt monetarily and then it leads them to choose indentureship in faraway islands. Ghosh also shows how colonialism facilitates the inroads of capitalism into Indian society. The text of these two novels are actually the most acerbic

critiques of colonialism produced so far by Ghosh. The history of opium trade and the indentureship throws light on the duplicity of the colonial ideals, so aptly expressed by Trocki:

> They opposed slavery, feudalism, superstition, piracy, and oppression. And yet, as we know, the European empires were exploitive, racist, violent, and fundamentally pernicious. ... This reality made the dream a dangerous delusion, both for the English and their subjects." (19, 20, Trocki)

I find that in both these novels, specially in *River of Smoke*, in the vast catechism-like deliverance of arguments and counter-arguments regarding the workings and interference of the British Empire in South and South East Asia, it is unambiguously proved that there cannot be a good imperialism.

Sea of Poppies

Sea of Poppies is Amitav Ghosh's sixth novel and was published in 2008. It is the first of his famous Ibis trilogy. In all these three novels, Ghosh deals in chiefly opium farming and trade and indentureship. There is not much research done and written about the history of opium trade as well as opium wars. Although Ghosh is not the first author to take up the hitherto neglected subject of opium trade as Kunal Basu is the first author to write a novel on this subject—*The Opium Clerk* (2001). The publication of *Sea of Poppies* followed by River of Smoke and Flood of Fire initiated a new surge of interest in this subject.

Not that opium was introduced to Asia by the Europeans. Opium came to India and then travelled to China and other South East Asia countries later, with the Arab merchants. When Albuquerque comes to India in 1509, opium has been widely used in India. The change Europeans bring in here is the way of using the drug. Before the Europeans arrive, opium has been used mainly in medicinal purpose. Drug abuse of opium starts and therefore the demand for opium increases by leaps and bounds. This increased demand makes the opium market lucrative.

The opium problem used to be considered generally as an Oriental problem but it was the Westerners, specially the British, to be more precise, the British East India Company who had the hegemonic control over the opium manufacturing and opium trade.

While a drug cannot be considered as a primary commodity, the British and American merchants insisted on considering it as a primary commodity showing the high demand of it. Ironically, drug trade has always been a crucial factor in changing the course of economics and consequently history of the world.

Fernand Braudel has termed the turn-over of such enterprises super-profits which manage and monopolize their long distance business. E.g. the opium trade by the East India Company. And in these cases, when the need be, the state comes in aid of the mercantile enterprises by coining new laws, and even by fighting wars with other nations. In short, the state protects such mercantile enterprises which makes super profits and consequently, brings huge revenues for the state. (Braudel, 1979, 405-08) (p.24-25)

What is more disturbing about Burnham is that he, instead of even keeping mum about his trade and illegitimacy of it, he tries to legitimize his business enterprise and even he tries to glorify it. One such example is his comment in reaction to Abolishment to Reid exudes deeply ingrained superciliousness: “When the doors of freedom were closed to the African, the Lord opened them to a tribe that was yet more needful of it—the Asiatick”.

Thus it is quite clear that all the justifications of the colonizers and the opium merchants and the suppliers of indentured labourers are simply word games and that too is not too clever specially when they try to use freedom as an innuendo of enslavement.

Capitalism Intruding Indian Agriculture and Society Hand in Hand with Colonialism

Opium was, in the nineteenth century, one of the most empire-friendly commodities circulating in the global economy. It had the capacity to balance imperial books, attract a seemingly endless number of customers, and, in a world where cargo space, like time, was money, take up little if any of the room on the ships of merchant princes, smugglers, and pirates.”, observes James L. Havia in his review paper “Opium, Empire, and Modern History”. (*China Review International*, University of Hawai’i Press, vol 10, No.2, 2003, p. 307) Generally, opium is historically related with China, but a look at the trade history and specially the opium wars gives a picture of opium’s world-wide network. In Ghosh’s novels as well as from other sources, it is known that

opium/morphine was widely used as sedative and analgesic in Britain and other countries. In India and China, the use of opium was known but it was not widely available and therefore, there was no situation of drug-abuse in vast scale. With the British East India Company's mercantile endeavour, there started a large scale contractual farming of opium all over the country wherever the Company had a strong hold. Although in the name it was called *contractual* farming, quite like the history of indigo plantation in colonial India, opium farming too is a history of force, violation, and deprivation. The agents of the British East India Company used to give advance money to farmers for cultivating opium with the condition that they would sell the harvest to the Company only for what price the Company would give. And it so happened that most of the times, because of huge production as well as because the Company was the chief determiner to fix the price, they farmers were compelled to sell their harvest in a miserably low price. Thus they could never take the advantage of a free market.

Rosa Luxemberg, in her *The Accumulation of Capital: A contribution to an economic explanation of imperialism,* elucidates the impact of imperialism on pre-capitalist society. According to her, imperialism encourages capitalist mode of production. Therefore, as Hamza Alavi observes that when imperialism entered into Indian economy, it first transformed the feudal or semi-feudal system of possession of property. In pre-colonial or pre-capital India, the landlords actually possessed the land as well as ruled the people who resided there. The imperial system seized the colonized land and distributed large chunks of land to the newly arrived members of the colonists or to a handful of native aristocrats, who further leased the land to farmers for short terms. They were called tax farmers. Thus began the chapter of Indian Zamindary. Those who were uprooted from their land would serve as wage-labourers in the mines, factories, and in the agricultural sector. The process of seizing of land was eased by raising the taxation of land to an exorbitant amount. This is partly the history of the Permanent Settlement Act (1793) too.(Alavi, 359-371)

A pre-capitalist society is ideal for a capitalist system to flourish in it. The functions in two ways—it uses the pre-capitalist society (which has been hitherto unproductive of any surplus value) as a site of production of surplus value as well as the supplier of cheap labour. (Luxemberg, 368) In *Sea of Poppies,* through the narrative of Deeti, we see that before the beginning of the

opium trade, the entire agrarian fraternity produced crops according to their needs. They farmed mostly pulses, wheat and other edible crops.

But the agency or the system which encourages the capitalist mode of production or get benefitted (monetarily or in other ways) goes all out to discourage the non-capitalist mode of production e.g. handicraft or cottage industry, or *monetarily* non- profitable agricultural produce.(Luxemberg, 295-6) In *Sea of Poppies*, we see a picture of this destruction of traditional farming pattern and the induction of a commercially profitable crop which would yield good turn over but drain the small farmers economically. They become so much impoverished that they could never get out of the vicious circle of contract framing.

When Deeti, on her way to escape the wrath of her in-laws' kins for not being a sati, reaches her ancestral village and keeps a vigil to meet Kabutri, her daughter, she reflects on the cyclical misery opium farming inflicts on the farmers:

> …: the opium harvest having been recently completed, the plants had been left to wither in the fields, so that the countryside was blanketed with the parched remnants. Except for the foliage of a few mango and jackfruit trees, nowhere was there anything green to relieve the eye. This, she knew, was what her own fields looked like, and were she at home today, she would have been asking herself what she would eat in the months ahead: where were the vegetables, the grains? She had only to look around to know that here as in the village she had left, everyone's land was in hock to the agents of the opium factory: every farmer had been served with a contract, the fulfilling of which left them with no option but to strew their land with poppies. And now, with the harvest over and little grain at home, they would have to plunge still deeper into debt to feed their families. It was as if the poppy had become the carrier of the Karmanasa's malign taint, (*Sea of Poppies*, 188-189)

Partha Chatterjee reminds that the task of a historian is to analyze the different equations taking place in various spheres of society due to the intrusion of capitalism into a pre-capitalist system. (Chatterjee, "The Colonial State and Peasant Resistance in Bengal, 1920-1947," 302) He also elaborates on the debate on the effect of commercialization of the agricultural system. that the

commercialization of the agricultural system which abolishes the pre-capitalist tradition of farming and "starts a process of differentiation among the peasantry," helps to perpetuate the relation between bondage and exploitation in pre-capitalist semi-feudal system. The debt-credit system actually gives the landlords, money-lenders and traders more authority over the production. (Chatterjee, 304) And in this new system, they can not only dictate the farmers what to sow but compel the farmers to sell the yield to them only and for whatever price they (landlords/moneylenders) offer.

Ironically, Ghosh shows that while the British and American merchants supported and initiated a full-fledged war between the British Empire and in India the draconian system of contractual farming did not let the farmers take advantage of the free market where they can get a better price for their produce. And the system functioned in a cyclical patter. Once a farmer enters into this system, can never get out of it. Ghosh throws light on these other spheres which came into existence because of the change in the agricultural system. Hamza Alavi shows that the dissolution of the pre-capitalist system of agriculture initiates a separation between the economic and political power in the colonial state. (Alavi, Hamza. "India: Transition from Feudalism to Colonial Capitalism."*Journal of Contemporary Asia,* x, 1980. Pp. 359-98)

Here I would like to articulate an important observation of Ghosh's novels. The thesis has proved so far, that Ghosh's novels are peopled with characters from different economic stations of society including the subalterns. But in his earlier novels generally, the characters from comparatively elite background play the role of the narrator, or to be precise, have more narrative space. But the role of the subaltern characters have evolved over time in Ghosh's novels. In the later novels, specially in the Ibis trilogy, the narrative space of the subaltern characters is more than that of the earlier novels. In the later novels, specially in the Ibis trilogy, the narrative space of the subaltern characters is more than that of the earlier novels. In the *Ibis trilogy,* specially in *Sea of Poppies,* through this kaleidoscopic portrayal of various sections colonial as well as colonized society, Ghosh shows this bifurcation of economic and political authority. He shows that the native zamindars, although enjoy economic affluence, cannot exercise political prowess any longer like precolonial time. On the other hand, the subaltern section seem to be keen observers of political changes and adapt accordingly. The indentureship or migration of bonded labourers to faraway islands from India is a result of the debt-bondage mechanism of opium farming. Ghosh

shows how the subaltern section used this system to flee from the oppressive casteist system of rural India.

A subaltern representing the self and exercising the agency

Anjali Gera Roy defines the indentured labourers leaving India for Mauritius in *Sea of Poppies* as *subaltern cosmopolitans.* (Roy, 34) Going for the indentureship gives the subalterns a new sort of agency. Although choosing indentureship can be explained as an economic compulsion for the bankrupt farmers who cannot pay their debts, in a way, this is a choice which they can avail and while going for it, they can defy the rather stringent casteist laws of the inland. On board in the Ibis, when other women ask Deeti about her caste, she feels a constraint at first and then comes out of it. This very moment in which her indecision dissolves and she chooses her answer, is, in a way, a moment of liberation too.

> *É tohran jat kaun ha?* The girk asked eagerly. And your caste?
>
> I am…
>
> Once again, just as she was about to provide an accustomed answer, Deeti's tongue tripped on the word that came first to her lips: the name of her caste was an intimate art of herself as the memory of her daughter's face –but now it seemed as if that too were a part of a past life, when she had been someone else. She began again hesitantly: We, my *jora* and I…
>
> Confronted with the prospects of cutting herself loose from her moorings in the world Deeti's breath ran out. She stopped to suck in a deep draught of air before starting again… We, my husband and I, we are Chamars… (230)

Obviously till this point of time, Deeti could not choose most things of her life—her family, husband (… Singh), her in-laws, and her caste, but at this moment when she chooses a caste for her, somehow she gives her a new identity. In fact, she feels the same when the others ask her name. She suddenly realizes that for long since the birth of her daughter, she has been addressed as Kabutri ki ma, meaning the mother of kabutri. She is defined through her relation with others. Now when she tells her given name which no one calls her with, she feels the uniqueness of being someone who is complete in herself. On the other hand, when Munia another girl who is also a co-

passenger calls her sister because she is a Mussahar, the other women claim that it is not an exclusive sisterhood between these two women, but all of them, are sisters now as they have boarded the same boat. By claiming a sisterhood across the borders of castes, these women, who are illiterate and have been tortured physically, mentally and sexually, for being not women only, but for being of low caste and poor also, make their voice heard at least.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak clarifies the relational difference between Subaltern Studies and Marxism and Subaltern Studies' dependency on Feminism in "The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview." She argues that when Subaltern Studies takes up the lowest rung of society for discussion, it takes multiple factors into consideration, not the "capital logic" only as Marxism does. Besides, it also uses feminist theories when the subaltern is gendered. (Spivak, 324) In the same vein, when Amitav Ghsoh depicts the third world subaltern women, he does not focus on their gendered identity only, but lists the other social factors like caste, class etc. Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues in "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse" that in the process of assuming the third world women as a homogenous category and studying their oppressed position, the first world feminists objectify the third world women.(Mongia, 177) Besides, Valorie Amos and Pratibha Parmar argue that the first world feminists' assumption of the third world women as "traditional," "politically immature" should be challenged. (Mongia, 177)

In his earlier novels, Ghosh's female characters, even when they are subalterns, have a very strong agency (Zindi, Mangala, Urmila) In the *Ibis trilogy,* Ghosh creates a space of comparison between the colonized subaltern women and the White women residing in India at the same time. A comparison between Mrs. Burnham and any of the Indian subaltern female character shows that the White women, though are supposed to be less oppressed than their native Indian counterparts are no better in reality. Like Deeti, Mrs. Burnham could not choose her husband. And in her case too, her marriage is used as a monetary settlement between two families. And Deeti, somehow could get out of the tyrannical reins of her in-laws, after her husband's death and start life anew, Mrs. Burnham could get out of her suffocatingly unhappy marriage and escape the blackmails of her lover Zachery Reid only through self-destruction. It would be a case of sweeping generalization to conclude that the third world subaltern women had more agency and options when it came to social mobility compared to their affluent Anglo-Indian counterparts, from this

one example, but even among the European women, social standing as such, was not always commensurate to the agency they could exercise.

Paulette whose parents were French, gets a shelter in the Burnham family, after she lost her father. Paulette who has been raised by a Bengali Muslim nanny becomes almost destitute after her father's death, as he died a bankrupt. Paulette is looked down upon by the Burnhams because of her fluency in Bengali and habits akin to the native people. Apparently, she could be considered a White subaltern in the 19th century Anglo-Indian society of Calcutta, but through the course of Ibis trilogy, we see that she gets out of the claustrophobic Burnham household and by doing that she gets rid of Mr. Burnham's masochistic exploitations and Judge Kendelbush's marriage proposal. Afterwards, she boards the Ibis (the ship) and goes to Mauritus. Eventually, she starts working as an assistant botanist which has always been her passion. It seems that women in the lower rung of both the native society as well as the Anglo-Indian society are better-equipped to get away from their oppressive states. In fact, in Bama's *Sangati* (2005) too, the same observation is echoed. Although the context is very different from *Sea of Poppies* both spatially and temporally, the child narrator reflects that women of upper caste, affluent families have less access and mobility outside the domestic space. Undoubtedly, the subaltern (Dalit) women in *Sangati,* have a compulsion to go out as the men in their families cannot have sufficient economic means to support the families, but in spite of this circumstantial obligation, the Dalit women at least have more freedom to choose compared to upper-caste affluent women.

Deeti is one of the most prominent characters in *Sea of Poppies* as well as the entire Ibis trilogy. Through Deeti, Ghosh also shows how an illiterate rural woman in colonial era whose status is subaltern in every sense, uses whatever domestic resources she has. After the wedding night and her unconscious consummation of the marriage, when she comes to see through the whole episode of drugging her and then raping her to impregnate, she takes a revenge in her own way. She does not confront them because she knows that she could never win in such confrontations as her in-laws are monetarily and politically, and even in the military sense, more powerful and influential. She silently starts slow-poisoning her mother-in-law. with opium. When she comes to know that her mother-in-law would try her best to impregnate her again by Chandan Singh, her brother-in-law, she begins to think about avoiding that situation:

…, she had to think, it was no use to weep and bemoan the influence of the planets. She thought of her husband and his torpid, drowsy gaze: how was it that his eyes were so different from his mother's? Why was his gaze so blank and hers, so sharp and cunning? The answer came to Deeti all of a sudden—of course, the difference lay in the wooden box.

[…]…, she pared a few shavings from a cake of hard abkari opium. Slipping the pieces into the folds of her sari, she locked the box…

Next morning Deeti mixed a little trace of opium into her mother-in-law's sweetened milk.[…] From that day on she began to slip traces of the drug into everything she served her mother-in-law; she sprinkled it on her achars, kneaded it into her dalpuris, fried it into her pakoras. In a very short time, the old woman grew quieter and more tranquil… (*Sea of Poppies,* 37)

Seeing her success in the usage of opium, she begins to take interest in learning the characteristics of different indigenous herbs: " She began to pay closer attention to dais and ojhas, the travelling midwives and exorcists who occasionally passed through their village; she learnt to recognize plants like hemp and datura… (*Sea of Poppies*, 37)

Here, Ghosh not only points to the kind of effective recourse a subaltern woman would take to avoid her misery, but he also shows how she grabs the opportunities of learning new things and there were modes of learning besides the colonial academic system.

In the same essay, Spivak alleges that the other members of the Subaltern Studies group (except Susie Tharu) have not employed feminist theories in their studies. She mentions Ranajit Guha's reading of "Chandra Death" to have traces of "patriarchal benevolence" and "critique."(325) Ghosh's descrition of the third world subaltern women is informed with neither any high-handed patriarchal benevolence nor a critical gaze. He shows both the women in the same household, Deeti and Deeti's mother-in-law try to outdo each other. While Deeti's mother-in-law with all her command over her sons and the household tries to maintain the patriarchal biddings she has been schooled into, Deeti silently sabotages it. Here, Deeti cannot speak; rather she chooses not to speak.

Through Deeti's learning of folk medicine, Ghosh hints at the indigenous system of learning and the colonizers' apparent disregard for that. In Neelrattan Halder, Ghosh draws the picture of a person who is an elite among his native countrymen, but the English community has a mixed opinion about him. Unlike Deeti, Neelrattan has got the opportunity to have a formal education and he is well-versed in multiple languages. Despite his knowledge of both the languages of India and that of the colonizers, he could not get out of colonial juridical trap. Through these two persons Deeti and Neel, and later on Paulette, Ghosh shows the influence of the colonial capital on the production of knowledge. And he also shows how under the influence of colonial capital, the native characters whether subaltern or elite had to compulsively transgress. Bibhash Choudhury describes both Deeti and Neel as transgressors. "Yet, the transgressions of a Deeti or a Neel operate in ways which suggest that their particular positions contribute to the way they eventually respond: they end up becoming transgressors, if we are to move this point a little further, because that is the only way they can still exist, in other words, to be is to transgress." (Choudhury, 167)

The subaltern and the production of knowledge in colonial India

The examples of Neel and Deeti show the hegemonic categorization of knowledge by Europe in the colonies. First in Deeti and then in Sarju, we see that knowledge is not always confined to books and the academia. Even it is partly acknowledge by Doughty, a British opium merchant, residing in Calcutta himself, though in quite a derisive remark on Neel's habit of reading.

Neel, unlike his father, has learnt English, and read English literature and contemporary English philosophy specially of Lock and Hume by heart. But the duplicity of the colonial system, specially the hollowness in the grand civilizing mission is evident when Doughty tells Zachary how he used to love to be in the dinner parties thrown by Neel's father, but Neel is a bookish native:

> 'This young fellow's no more like the old man than stink-wood is like mahogany.'… 'See, there's one think I can't abide it's a bookish native: his father was a man who knew how to keep his jib where it belonged—wouldn't have been seen dead with a book. But this little chuckeroo gives himself all kinds of airs—a right strut-noddy if ever I saw one. It's

not as if he's real nobility, …' […] Wait till you hear the barnshoot bucking in English—like a bandar reading aloud from *The Times.'* (47)

Neel too, much later in the novel, when he has already lost his zamindery understands the mockery of the declaration of justice in the colonial system, when he is chastised by the Judge in the courtroom: "All are equal who appear before it.." (232) the underlying hypocrisy in it as the same person declares the duty of the superior race towards the civilizations in their infancy.

River of Smoke

River of Smoke as it is affirmed by the author himself is the second part of Ibis Trilogy. Naturally it contains a lot of elements and issues which are there in the *Sea of Poppies*. Ghosh shows how through the long tortuous sea- voyages, the languages of both South Asia and Europe undergo certain evolutions. The transoceanic voyages described in *River of Smoke* unfold the myriad factors causing a large scale migration of people and the consequences of it. This paper is a study of the enormously unsettling dilemma in the indentured people's mind about a settlement. Circumstances forced these people to leave India forever but the memory of their ancestral land was carried by them. The local rituals, festivals which they celebrated in those far-away islands gradually became the mnemonic metaphors of remembering and reliving India. In the process of such transportation of culture, language has been a very crucial medium. The people in exile accepted the language of the new land but they did not give up their mother tongues completely. The way the languages, specially Bhojpuri spoken by a lot of people from the Gangetic belt, took new shape in the new lands, manifests the utter fluid quality of them.

Besides the lives of the indentured labourers in Mauritius, Ghosh gives a detailed trajectory of the politics and economics which were instrumental behind the first Opium War. (1839-42)

In this section of the chapter, I have discussed in what ways the colonial capital tried to encroach on China, the cultural reinforcement of subaltern identity and the commodification of knowledge under the influence of colonial capitalism.

Colonial Capital and Balancing the Trade Deficit

The most objectionable part in the European merchants' rationale is their double standard way to judge their own reasons against the contemporary Chinese legislature—On the one hand they were advocating for a free market and free trade, claiming it to be an essential part of their idea of freedom according to the European ideals, but they are cunningly selective about highlighting the ideals of European Enlightenment. They obstinately cling to the Chinese soil in order to do business, but they vehemently argued that they would not abide by the Chinese Law but the Law of the Queen. The irony is that even according to that Royal law of England, uncensored trading of opium was illegal. It seems that by showing their illegal trade of opium, to be more precise, the smuggling of opium, as legal, they point to the Chinese emperor as an oppressor of humanity, a despot (a la Adam Smith who gives specific cases when smuggling is legal in his *The Wealth of Nation).* (*River of Smoke,* 516)

The opium trade in China was chiefly controlled by British and American merchants, although a small number of Indians and merchants from a few European nations were also involved in it. Before the First Opium War, there were large scale exports from China of tea and porcelain to the rest of the world, but there was little import of any goods or commodities from these countries. Therefore, there was a huge trade deficit. The selling of huge amount of opium was the only means to balance this deficit. Thus the British East India Company used the Indian pre-capitalist system as the site of production of surplus value (opium in this case) exploiting the cheap labour of the peasants and then they chose another pre-colonial, pre-capitalist land, China, to sell that product. In this system of super-profit, the whole monetary gain is absorbed by the colonizers at the expense of exploitation of both the producer (India) and the consumer China). This mechanism is aptly explained by Rosa Luxemberg thus:

> " At this point we should revise the conceptions of internal and external markets which were so important in the controversy about accumulation. They are both vital to capitalist development and yet fundamentally different, though they must be conceived in terms of social economy rather than of political geography. In this light, the internal market is the capitalist market, production itself buying its own products and supplying its own elements of production. The external market is the non-capitalist social environment which absorbs the products of capitalism and supplies producer goods and labour power for capitalist production." (Luxemberg, 366)

Ghosh reconstructs the debates over the legitimacy of carrying on with the opium trade in China within the British and American merchant fraternity in this novel. These debates, as portrayed by Ghosh, succinctly describes how much duplicity was there in the ideal of Free Trade. In such a debate, when Mr. King who tries to make the other merchants understand the basic flaw and gross deviation of humanity in the mechanism of opium trade and why the merchants should obey the Chinese Laws and orders to stop or check the trade, Dent dismisses his observation by saying that as the Chinese are fundamentally different from the Europeans and inferior to them, their opinions could be ignored. Following Dent's tongue-in-cheek remark, Mr. Burnham's supercilious comments and the replies from the side of Mr. King give a picture of a fundamentally Orientalist trait in the colonial capitalist trade:

> 'It is my opinion that our friends of the Co-Hong are working upon the feelings of those of us who are not, by nature and inclination, imbued with the usual degree of masculine fortitude.'
>
> 'What does masculinity have to do with it,' said Mr. King.
>
> 'Masculinity has everything to do with it,' said Mr. Burnham. 'It is surely apparent to you, is it not, that effeminacy is the curse of the Asiatic? It is what makes him susceptible to opium; it is what makes him so fatefully dependent on government. If the gentry of this country had not been weakened by their love of painting and poetry China would not be in the piteous state that she is in today. Until the masculine energy of this country is replenished and renewed, its people will never understand the value of freedom; nor will they appreciate the cardinal importance of Free Trade.'

Knowledge, culture, and the subalterns

In this novel, Ghosh shows how even without their access to the knowledge system recognized by the power-centre, the subalterns carry on with their cultural practices in exile. They do *customize* according to the need of the moment but they survive and with them their culture also survives. Deeti who, before setting foot in Mauritius, knew only Bhojpuri, has no problem in

narrating the stories of the migrants' journey, and escape from impending annihilation in Mauritian Creole:

> Bon-dýe! She would cry; are you a fol dogla or what? Don't be ridikil: the whole thing, from start to fini took just a few minits, and all that time, it was nothing but jaldi jaldi, a hopeless golmal, tus in dezord. It was a mirak, believe me, that the five managed to get away— and none of it would have been possible if not that for Serang Ali. (*River of Smoke*, p. 15)

There are many factors which determine the sustenance or evolution of a language. In case of a monolingual community, within the community, almost everywhere, there are different versions of the language. Caste, class or socio-economic statuses, exposure to education influence one's use of language. Therefore, within any given community, the elite do not speak in the same form of a language which the so called riff-raff use. When it comes to official acknowledgement, most of the times, it is the version of the elite section, which gets the recognition as the authentic version of the language. Again, most of the times the elites practice only those languages which are the means of official administrative, higher educational, and judiciary processes. Thus universally, they have a tendency to nurture the means of power. Raja Neelrattan Halder is an appropriate case in point here. Listening to the emotionally moving Bhojpuri songs sung by the women on *Ibis,* he reminisces how in his childhood he heard this language spoken by the servants but was always discouraged to learn it. On the other hand, the languages he gets meticulous training in are Persian, Hindustani, and English. Persian is a language with a rich store of classical literature, and it had been the language of administration and judiciary in India before the British occupied the systems. Then Hindustani too connects him with a large segment of North India. Lastly, English being the current language of administration, he learnt it too.

The striking difference between an elite language and a so called subaltern language or the language of the less privileged section of the society is that for the former one there is a huge written repository of the specific cultural or linguistic registers, but in case of the subalterns, owing to their illiteracy, the written documents are scant in number. Their cultural history as well as their language is mostly preserved by the rich oral tradition they have—songs, folk-tales etc. It imparts both a drawback and an advantage to the subalterns. Because of the lack of written documents,

there is a risk of complete oblivion, but at the same time the oral tradition keeps the language in a state of continuous flux. Once something is written it is final. Obviously, a text can divulge multiple (even mutually contradictory) meanings as the Deconstructive critics observe e.g. Jacques Derrida observes in his seminal book *Of Grammatology* how a text can offer multiple meanings to the reader. (Derrida 1998) Yet a written text does not have the fluidity which characterizes the oral tradition. In oral tradition, every raconteur or singer improvises the tale or the song according to his/her personal choice and the mood of the audience. Thus it never comes under the grip of fixity. Both in *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke,* Ghosh shows how the songs and folk rituals and traditions keep up the ways of the Indian migrants in Mauritius. Besides the songs, the Madhubani painting is one such example. When a pen is not available, a brush can serve the purpose. And in this case, Deeti's brush is more eloquent than even a pen. Both in Ghazipur, in the house of her in-laws and then in Mauritius, the small shrine which she creates herself with Madhubani painting becomes a wonderful testament of colonialism and its vagaries. Deeti's painting skill coupled with her un-worldly clairvoyance creates not only what has already happened, but what is yet to happen. With Deeti's futuristic paintings, Ghosh not only challenges the linear structure of history but gives an example that there can be other ways documenting memory. This documentation or the recalling of memory, events past, or the oral culture among the subaltern through which they pass on stories is generally not considered by the practitioners of History who give importance to the archival evidences. But as being someone from the peasant community and a woman, Deeti could not have used a pen, she uses a brush or a piece of charcoal to preserve her personal memory/history.

The subaltern migrants and religion

Interestingly, the annual pilgrimage in which an elederly Deeti leads the whole clan to her cave-shrine, she does not talk about the Hindu gods and goddesses, but her talk is full of references to Malum Zikri (Zachery Reid), Tantim Paulette, Nob Kissinbabu, many other shipmates and obviously Kalua. If Ghosh's account in the *River of Smoke* is compared with today's situation in Mauritius, it would seem that Ghosh tries to transcend the confines of religion with the crossing of the border of *kalapani.* The activities of the migrants in *River of Smoke* is quite secular.

Although Ghosh's account is free from any religious touch. During the departure, the migrants are heavy-hearted largely because of the irretrievable contamination it would bring to

their religious identity. Moreover, during crossing the Gangasagar, they recall the story of mythological story of Bhagirath and Sagar. But then when they are in Mauritius, their accounts are completely secular. Thus the journey on Ibis gets an epical status in the memory of the migrants, probably it is as deep as to replace their beliefs and perception of the Ramayanic sea-voyage.

Till the time the migrants embark upon their journey to Mauritius, their consciousness is very much replete with the puranic myths, but as soon as they themselves reach the new land, they in their subconscious mind perceive that they have done something which is transgressive as well as extra ordinary. Thus the new memory of the trans-oceanic migration/dislocation becomes a palimpsest written over the previous memory of a puranic myth. And this fact explains the formation of the memory temple which the fami Colver visit annually. Here, Deeti not only creates a shrine where she houses human beings instead of the pantheons of gods and goddesses, but the supernatural clairvoyance she is endowed with gives her an agency. The migrants whether in China or in Mauritius, are not too conservative about their ancestral language and culture although it does not mean that they are eager to forget their past. In Mauritius, the migrants' primary concern is their livelihood. Therefore, they are supposedly not too rigid about retaining the purity of their language and culture. Deeti and the other migrants, and later their children speak in the Mauritian Creole which is a mixture of French, English, and Bhojpuri.

Disciplining knowledge and Canton as a site of epistemic violence

Kanika Batra, in her reading of Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke,* elucidates the process of "city Botany" encroaching on the indigenous agricultural practices and the pattern of exchanging knowledge of herbs and plants. (Batra, 322-332) In *Sea of Poppies*, through Deeti's observations, Ghosh delineates how the colonial capital completely changed the agricultural landscapes of rural India. *River of Smoke,* Ghosh gives a very detailed description of how the concepts of free trade and free market which the British and American merchants claim to be the cause of Opium Wars. In *River of Smoke* and then later in *Flood of Fire* as well Ghosh shows a keenness on the part of Western scholarship to be influenced by the myths and stories which were in popular currency. In the case of compulsive farming of poppy and before that indigo in India, the indigenous crop patterns were gravely disturbed and they contributed to severe scarcity of food as well. What

motivated this outrageous form of indigo and poppy production was huge commercial profits in the international market, but the mad rush for an elusive flowering plant Camellia among Western scholars was founded in their willingness to believe in the mythical stories circulated in public Chinese imagination about Camellia.

In *River of Smoke*, we see that besides the opium merchants who throng Canton in order to sell their opium, some British scholars and painters also are there in search of camellia. The botanist, Fitcher under whom Paulette works as an assistant comes to China partly for the same reason. He does have his nursery there and send his collections of plants to England, but also goes on in his quest for golden Camellia, a flowering plant first introduced to the West by James Cunnighame, a "plant-hunter." Fitcher explains that when transporting live plants and flowers from China to Europe was not possible in the first half of the eighteenth century, Cunnighame used to send the dried specimens and a vast collection of paintings of Chinese flora which he used to get done by local Chinese painters. When he exhibited is collections of paintings, it evoked much amazed scepticism because the Europeans were not familiar with the aesthetic beauty of Chinese flowers. His paintings were even compare to phoenixes, unicorns and such other mythical imaginations. Later on the skeptics had to swallow their words when real flowers (chrysanthemums, hydrangeas, lilies, and many other indigenous Chinese species) reached Europe. Although possibilities of commercial benefits partially motivated Cunninghame to take up the task of discovering golden Camellia, his conviction in his aim was based on Chinese mythology:

> It was not merely because of their flowers that camellias were of special interest to Cunnighame: he believed that next to foodgrains this genus was possibly the most valuable botanical species known to man. This was not a far-fetched notion: the camellia family had, after all, given the world the tea bush, *Camellia sinensis,* which was already then the fount of an extensive and lucrative commerce. Cunninghame's interest in its sister plants was sparked by a Chinese legend, about a man who fell into a valley that had no exit: he was said to have lived there for a hundred years eating nothing but a single plant. This plant, Cunninghame was told, was of a rich golden colour and yielded an infusion that could turn white hairs into black, restore the suppleness of aged joints, and serve as a cure for ailments of the lungs. (*River of Smoke,* 122-23)

Now if we look at the history of the categorical compartmentalization of knowledge, we would find that it was done in order to neatly fit them into academic space. According to Pierre Bourdieu, "A discipline has an academic and socially acknowledged name (that for example can be found in a library classification system). A discipline is inscribed in, and upheld by, the national and international networks of research, university departments, research institutes and scientific journals that produces, certifies, rewards, and upholds that which he calls the discipline's capital. And a discipline is characterized by a particular, unique academic and social style." (As quoted by Strand, 272) It is quite obvious that no such legend or myth would get a place in contemporary Western of Academia. Macaulay's infamous "Minute on Education" (1835) is possibly the most vociferous objection to such a story. My argument here is, while the Western scholarship denies the Orient any sort of authority over knowledge because of its orality, lack of documentation, or interventions of myths and legends into the texts, the Occident itself reserves a case for willing suspension disbelief at the very foundation of its pursuit of knowledge.

Conclusion

The thematic thread which binds these novels is the issue of the imperialist exploitation of natural and human resources in India and China. The exploitation starts with the compulsive farming of opium by Indian peasants. Then as Partha Chatterjee asserts that the induction of colonial capital in pre-capitalist peasant society affects many other relations, we see a long chain of historical events—indentureship, obliteration of indigenous knowledge system, opium trade, Opium War taking place one after another. Apparently they look very apart from each other, but Amitav Ghosh shows that historically they are very much connected. And there is a self-proclaimed bearer of the White man's burden in Mr. Burnham who can see divine Providence in African slave trade, and in Asian indentureship, and then again in opium trade in China. All these, according to him, are means to exercise freedom. Amitav Ghsoh, thus unravels the racist and Orientalist thought which motivated the journey of the colonial capital in India and China in *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke.*

This chapter also shows how Ghosh instead of putting the subaltern in a definitive straightjacket, maintains the variegated nature. Deeti, Paulette, Chi Mei, Ah Fatt—all are subalterns and they are contemporary too, but are very different from each other. Deeti is not a

subaltern if her caste is considered, but she is a subaltern as a woman. Paulette, too is an European woman in British colonial India, who is supposed to be more authoritative than a native woman, but because of her circumstances, she is a subaltern. Chi Mei and Ah Fatt are boat people and are subjugated by all possible rules coined by the mainstream Chinese society. But all these subaltern characters, whether Indian or Chinese or European try to defy the laws which are the means of their subjugation, imposed by the more powerful authority. The means of defiance, most of the times, is transgression from the accepted norms. Deeti, does it first by eloping with Kalua, a low-caste man, and then crossing the ocean, the *kalapani*. Paulette does it in innumerable ways: by speaking in fluent Bengali, wearing sari, fleeing from the Burnhams and then by donning men's attire and taking up a job, which at that time was considered suitable for men only. Chi Mei tries to live a very humble life what is expected of the boat people, but because of her bastard son, Ah Fatt, has to accept deviations from the norms too. She has to let Ah Fatt learn calligraphy and take lessons in art and sports because of Bahram's insistence and the money which she receives for all these. One can see that, all these characters try to come out of their circumstantial bindings because of the repression which accentuates and augments their desire. Frederic Jameson observes that repression helps a person to fathom the 'genuine' desires. Therefore, such desires, by their nature, are transgressive. (Jameson, 53) In Deeti's case, her husband's impotence, getting raped by her brother-in-law has intensified her desire to transgress. And all these oppressive events, represent the contemporary patriarchal norms and laws in various degrees.

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CHAPTER 5

IDENTIFYING THE LOSS OF SELF OF BOTH THE ELITE AND THE SUBALTERN IN *THE GLASS PALACE* AND *FLOOD OF FIRE*

In this chapter, I have tried to delineate the issue of the schism in the Indian people's psyche irrespective of their social and economic position during the colonial regime. For this study I have taken up *The Glass Palace* and *Flood of Fire*. Ghosh describes in these two novels how both elite and subaltern Indians find themselves in a situation of being participants in the colonizing process and this realization has permanently planted a dilemma in their minds.

Through his portrayals of various characters, for example the Collector and Arjun in *The Glass Palace* and Neelrattan Halder and Kesri Singh in *Flood of Fire*, Ghosh gives a detailed nature of the dilemma of colonized Indians. This common feature in both these novels specifically explains why I club them together. *The Glass Palace* (2000) came long before *Flood of Fire* (2015), and *Flood of Fire* is the last part of the *Ibis trilogy*. What is common in these two novels is that the characters come from various social and economic spheres of society, but no one could completely avoid the schismatic effect of colonialism.

In both of these novels, I find mimicry to be a predominant process which transforms both the elite and the subaltern sections. Mimicry and mimesis functioned in many different levels in colonial India. In fact, mimicry was one of the means to ascend the social ladder. Therefore, in the native bourgeois circle, the Indians, as we see in *The Glass Palace,* try to emulate the colonizers. In the lower rung of society, as it has been proved historically, economically the mass try to keep allegiance with the sounder economic system, and that too, in this case is the colonial system.

The Glass Palace

Ghosh captures a vast time frame in *The Glass Palace* starting from the time before the annexation of Burma to British India, to 1990s. Therefore, there are many political transitions in this novel: pre-colonial to colonial and then colonial to post-colonial. But it seems that Ghosh also

tries to portray life in its holistic form which consists love, faithfulness, betrayal, and obviously death. What I find in this novel most noteworthy is various types of relationships—conjugal relationships among aristocrats, among marginal people, among multi-ethnic people, interpersonal relation between military officers and their subordinates, between comrades, between a British officer and an Indian officer. While the broadly noticeable aspect of this novel is its political transitions, I attempt to discuss the many transitions, the characters undergo consciously or unconsciously in this novel. Sometimes, in order to cross their boundaries, they willingly go through such transitions, sometimes, they do not even realize the change, or refuse to acknowledge for dread of fragmentation of the self.

Man, woman, and mimicry

It would be an injustice to categorize this novel as belonging to a particular literary genre: historical or postcolonial. In an interview, Ghosh himself has expressed his unwillingness to be classified as a postcolonial writer. He believes that Postcolonial criticism is a thoroughly cerebral construct and does not reflect the reality: "When I look at the works of critics, such as Homi Bhabha, I think they have somehow invented this world which is just a set of representations of representations. They've retreated into a world of magic mirrors and I don't think anyone can write from that sort of position" (Silva and Tickell 214-15). In spite of his declaration, I find that Bhabha's concept of mimicry in the context of colonized India to be a significant trait that runs throughout *The Glass Palace,* manifesting it in most of the characters. There are various issues portrayed in this novel, I find that in the context of this novel, mimicry and man are exclusively connected to each other. Mimicry and mimesis functioned in many different levels in colonial India. In fact, mimicry was one of the means to ascend the social ladder. In this context, Bhabha observes:

> The discourse of post-Enlightenment English colonialism often speaks in a tongue that is forked, not false. If colonialism takes power in the name of history, it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce. For the epic intention of the civilizing mission, 'human and not wholly human' in the famous words of Lord Rosebery, 'writ by the finger of the Divine' often produces a text rich in the traditions of *trompe-l'aeil*, irony, mimicry and repetition."(*The Location of Culture,* 122)

There is quite a trend that most of the male characters in this novel come under the influence of colonialism and perform the act of mimicry consciously or unconsciously, while the female characters are seen to have been less influenced or almost uninfluenced by the effects of colonialism. Throughout all his novels, the women characters of Ghosh are very firm on their ideological ground. They vacillate less than their male counterparts. It is true in the case of *The Glass Palace* too. Dolly, Uma Dey, the princesses, Queen Supayalat, Alison, and even Manju and Jaya, who dwell for short durations in the vast time-frame of this novel, are pretty sure about their lives and goals. On the other hand, the elite male characters are almost in a permanent state of dilemma—the Collector and Arjun. Rajkumar and Kishan Singh who do not belong to the class of Arjun or the Collector are ideologically less influenced by colonialism, although the character of Kishan Singh does not develop fully in the breadth of this novel.

Thus, Ghosh's stand is with that of Partha Chatterjee. Chatterjee observes that the nationalist thinking often divides the indigenous space into the public and the private and assumes that the public which contains the academia, jurisdiction, media, politics is influenced by colonialism but the private/home remains uncontaminated. And as the home is regarded as exclusive space for women, women are thought to remain un-influenced by the colonial system. (Chatterjee, "Women and the Nation," 135-157)

In *The Glass Palace*, the time frame is as I have already mentioned, epochal and characters are many, but among them the Collector, Beni Prasad Dey, Uma Dey (Beni Prasad's wife), Rajkumar, and Arjun are more developed than the rest. Unlike many other novelists who are Indian or of Indian origin, Ghosh's characters are not limited to a particular socio-economic class. Educated, uneducated, rich, poor, government service holder, peasant—everyone gets a place in his novels. In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh beautifully portrays the dilemma of the middle class or upper middle class people, specially the Bengali bhadralok section. People like Arjun or the Collector Beni Prasad Dey belong to this class. In people like Kishan Singh in *The Glass Palace* or Kesri (a more prominent subaltern character in the *Ibis Trilogy*), one can see that the choice of soldiery as their profession has an economic motive. They join the British Indian army for better salary. Ghosh puts Beni Prasad Dey or Arjun beside these subaltern characters to accentuate the dilemma in the affluent section. Arjun, an army officer, and Beni Prasad Dey, a Government official are in a state of permanent dilemma. Either they do not realize the precarious ideological

situation they are in, or they realize it and can do nothing about it. Therefore, two most prominent characters who are specially noticeable in this novel, for their acts of mimicry and the consequent dilemma are Beni Prasad Dey and Arjun.

Beni Prasad Dey is Uma's husband. He goes to England for his higher studies at Cambridge and passes the Indian Civil services Exam. So he returns to India a proud ICS officer. Therefore, when Uma's family gets a marriage proposal of Beni Prasad for their daughter, they find it as a great fortune for their daughter. On the other hand, Arjun (Uma's nephew) is a happy-go-lucky boy and when everyone has lost hope that he would ever do something meaningful in life, Arjun cracks the entrance examination of the British Indian Army. Arjun joins the British Indian Army as a commissioned officer. There are clear references in the novel that both Beni Prasad's and Arjun's jobs in the British administration and defense significantly contribute to the enhancement of their family's pride and prestige in society. Here, Ghosh depicts a part of the late 18th and early 19th century urban Bengali society. Uma's family belongs to this part which is called the Bhadrasamaj or the Bhadralok society. Parimal Ghosh gives a somewhat workable definition of Bhadralok in his essay "Where Have All The Bhadraloks Gone?" thus:

> As we are aware, in colonial times, the term was taken to mean primarily upper caste Hindus, with some landed property or access to a degree of wealth, usually substantial, and with some claim to a liberal education and through that to some profession or employment in a government or commercial office. (p.247)

Parimal Ghosh explains that the psyche of the bhadralok is forked from the very beginning:

> The bhadralok made his way in life by serving the colonial rulers, and perhaps, thus right from the beginning attained a guilt complex which he never got rid of. Sharpened by his exposure to the values of democracy and socialist ideas, the complex was tinged with a notion of pride. Of all of them he could feel the guilt alone. (Ghosh 2004, 248)

We see that Uma finds that she has a bountiful fortune after her husband's death, as he invested money very wisely. In Arjun's case too, after he gets the job in the army his father expresses his satisfaction over the fact that the boy would get a very good pension after retirement. Thus, it is not only the European art, or culture, or for that matter, modernity which allured a

section of Bengali society to take part in the colonizing process, the economic affluence which they could have in the colonial time was difficult for them to voluntarily squander. Therefore, partly, the participation of Bengali bhadraloks in the colonizing process of the British in India was an economic obligation. It can be argued here that it is the same for the huge number of North Indian peasants who joined the British Indian army. They also joined the army primarily for a sure supply of money. But in case of the Bengali bhadraloks, they enter into the colonial education system unlike the peasants who served as sepoys in the army. And because of the formers' exposure in the Western academia, they found out the duplicity in the basic propaganda of colonialism. The Enlightenment rationality apparently approves equality of all humans, and thus colonizing people of any part of the world should go against that ideology. Therefore, when the Bengali bhadraloks enter the education system, they found out the dichotomy of what the colonizers claimed to believe in and what they practiced in reality. But ironically, the bhadraloks could not disentangle themselves from the entire colonial process immediately after the discovery. They kept wavering. And for most of them, it was a lifelong wavering, and some tried to lull their conscience from which sprang their dilemma. The collector is such an example who could keep his conscience asleep till almost the end of his life.

Colonialism does not only wring out the material riches from its colonies, but Frantz Fanon observes that it controls the subjects and functions in such a way that it metamorphoses the colonized people's understanding of their own identity:

> Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. (170)

The colonial ideology, when a person is deeply influenced by it, as it happens with the Collector or to some extent, with Arjun later, creates a feeling of *sui generis* in them. And consequently they develop a narcissistic love for their own selves at the expense of contempt for their fellow countrymen. Actually the theoretical scaffolding of the project of colonialism as well as imperialism is this propaganda of better races. We see it most bluntly but clearly expressed in Macaulay's in/famous Minute on Indian education in which Macaulay observes that allowance of funds for the teaching of Arabic or Sanskrit or any discipline particularly associated with India is

not required because the entire oeuvre produced by the Orient is not worth a shelf of books of Western literature and therefore, there should be more emphasis on teaching of English and other conventional disciplines of Western academia. This education would transform the colonized into English in taste, but Indian in colour. And this brigade of colonized Anglicized men would help retain the Empire in India.

The Collector is an embodiment of Macaulay's idea. He is always impeccably dressed in "finely cut Savile Row suits". He is religiously fastidious about cutlery and table-manners. He is fond of Schubert. Moreover, the colonizing mission in the colonial education system almost attains Completion in his case because in him, we see that he himself has a civilizing mission. When Uma's family gets the marriage proposal from the Collector's family, and is elated at the good fortune of her, the question which resounds in Uma's mind is "Why me?" She repeatedly asks her relatives who serve as go-betweens in the proposal, the reason behind this choice because Uma is neither good-looking nor accomplished in the way the would-be brides are expected to be. And she comes to know that the Collector has chosen her because he thinks that she "will be quick to learn". Therefore, it is evident that he is not ready to take his wife as she is. He does not want a person who can think or has his/her own ideas, but one who can be moulded according to his tastes and ideology. This is simply what Macaulay wanted the Indians to be. It seems that he has not wanted a wife but an obedient pupil.

Unfortunately for him, Uma dreads his attempts of teaching her his English ways, but simultaneously resists any transformation, to be more precise, Anglicization. Therefore, it sounds like an utter irony when the Collector regrets that he has had a dream of a marriage in which both the spouses are equal:

> 'I used to dream about the kind of marriage I wanted.'… 'To live with a woman as an equal, in spirit and intellect: this seemed to me the most wonderful thing life could offer. To discover together the world of literature, art: what could be richer, more fulfilling? But what I dreamt of is not *yet* possible, not *here*, in India, not for *us*.' (*The Glass Palace*, 173, emphases added)

Precisely the reason he refers to for the un-fulfillment of his dream is the resistance to the colonizing or westernizing force. And as long as this force is palpable, it is, according to him, an

impossible dream for people in India. Moreover, the Collector considers the English/European art and literature to be the supreme standard of cultural and intellectual engagement. It is quite apt here, to cite from the preface to Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha asserts that the acceptability of the myth of touchstone of Taste is found only among the deprived. He maintains that the high culture of European art and English literature is a myth. He observes that he found the hollowness in this myth while he was on the acme of a literary-academic career. The quality which makes the traditionalist approach of Victorian high culture a watermark of culture for the educated Indian middle-class people is its elusiveness. (Bhabha, xi) We also see that the Collector, in his vain estimation of the exiled Burmese royal couple, considers them to be incapable of experiencing the finer qualities and instincts of life e.g. love, because they have not been educated. They never studied English/European poetry or came in touch with various art forms.

The Collector with all his ideological baggage and assumption of superior taste is the 'reformed' colonial subject" in whom one can see the mockery of European humanism. (Bhabha, 124) What Bhabha asserts that these mimic men are actually "the effect of flawed colonial mimesis." No doubt he has been Anglicized, but that comes with a price. The moment he says that the kind of marriage which he dreamed of is not possible in *India*, it is evident that he has distanced himself from his Indian origin. And no matter how much he tries to become English, he has to constantly struggle against the resistance which springs from both the Indians as well the British. The Collector finds problem with himself as well as the rest because he fails to understand that "…to be Anglicised is, emphatically not to be English." (Bhabha, 125) And the aim of colonial education was to anglicize the colonized, because as soon as the colonized would be English, there is no ground left for colonialism.

Colonialism's voyeuristic intent to discipline the colonized and the subalterns' resistance

The Collector's conversation with Queen Supayalat, the last Burmese Queen over the First Princess's pregnancy points to how much the colonial education has incapacitated the Collector in perceiving the reality. This conversation unravels the hypocrisy in the ideals of the colonizers. The Collector is dismayed at the news of the Princess's pregnancy, and expresses his surprise that because he has not issued a marriage license, it is not possible for the Princess to have a husband and without a (lawful) husband she cannot have a child. The Queen refutes his carefully

constructed syllogism with a declaration that children can be born without a license. The colonial directives have got such a deep mooring in the Collector that he cannot imagine that there can be anything outside the European normativity.

The British authority was very much precautious about preventing occurrences of miscegenation in their colonies as the emergence of mixed race people would shatter their carefully thought out race theory which is the cornerstone of legitimizing colonization in Asia and Africa. Foucault observes that towards the end of the 18th century, sexuality was not particularly in the area of law or jurisdiction, but it was more and more a subject of moral policing. The construction of norm and normativity actually gives rise to a lot of cultural conflicts between the East and the West. The Collector is so much blinded by his Western education that he cannot perceive that there can be a difference in thought and this other way of thinking can as well constitute a separate set of norms and normativity. It is not always rationality which the West educated Indian elites. The Indian elites could never get out of their colonial education as they begin to believe in the Western ideals. Had they been rational, their vision would not have been so much clouded as to not see the basic biology behind the birth of a child. Foucault asserts that the Western ideology tries to construct a circumventing discourse on sexuality and its legitimacy which ultimately refuses to acknowledge the very existence of sexuality. (*The History of Sexuality,* 25) The collector's amazement here amuses the Queen. In his *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault observes that the disciplining nature of the sources power started in the nineteenth century. He maintains that the repressive directive of power which was chiefly "juridico-discursive" finds the bodies to be the site of its exercise. He further asserts:

> the body is . . . directly involved in a political field: power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic uses; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination. (*Discipline and Punish*, 25)

The Collector's assertion of his power in issuing the marriage license for the First Princess echoes the repressive and negating quality of colonial power which through synonymizing

sexuality with marriage tries to negate sexuality. Thus Queen Supayalat's incisive sarcasm at the Collector's ignorance about the First Princess's pregnancy comes as a blow.

The schism is so deep in the Collector that he cannot differentiate between the real and the ideal. The very act of procreation is a biological reality while all the juridical-religious ideals which hedged in this act are in the realm of imaginary. The Collector takes the imaginary to be real and thus the amazed confusion. Just after his meeting with Supayalat, we see that the Collector is still in a trance-like state. The meeting leaves an oneiric effect on him. When he is departing the king's mansion, he chances to see Sawant briefly and immediately he felt a train of images crowding in on him—how Sawant has possibly seduced the First Princess, how the Princess has sneaked into his cottage, the creaking noise of the string-bed during their union. He feels uneasy and then hurriedly goes home. His Cambridge education has schooled him into believing in an idea of legitimate sex but consequently gives him the option of having a voyeuristic pleasure through unlawful fantasy.

And it seems that finally at this moment, he realizes the widening gap between his Anglicized self and the Indian one. At this moment, when he tells his wife about his transfer, the Collector feels himself as having an agency of the scopic drive of colonialism as well as being an object of the colonial surveillance. (Bhabha 127) It is because of the way he is treated after the news of the First Princess's pregnancy. The Collector tells his wife that he would be transferred to a less important post because of the occurrence of the dreaded miscegenation in the case of the First Princess's pregnancy (by their coachman).

The mansion in Ratnagiri, destined for King Thebaw and his family can be considered a Foucauldian "enclosure" in which the exiled Burmese royal family's would be "assessed", "calculated", "judged". (*Discipline and Punish*, 143) Thus the colonial system not only put them into a veritable gaol, but by restricting and regulating their actions tried to discipline them. Therefore, at the end when the Queen emphasizes on the fact that whatever rules and regulations the colonial system imposes on them in terms of their mobility or their right to marry or not marry, ultimately they, the gaoled, wins over the gaoler because babies are born without any license. The colonial system cannot un-sanction the birth of the First Princess's baby. The most it could do is to stigmatize the baby as a "bastard". Supayalat is miffed by the Collector's mention of marriage

license, but she disagrees to all the marriage proposals for her daughters too and rejects them to be below her daughters' status. When the Collector broaches the same issue that having a child with an Indian coachman, far below the aristocratic stature of the Princess would scandalize the family's reputation, Supayalat chides him that her daughter has not committed a crime by taking in the coachman as a partner. Thus, although Supayalat is a colonized subject, and after losing the kingdom, is economically dependent on the colonial government, she resists her mind to be colonized.

Although Queen Supayalat and Uma Dey have widely different backgrounds—Supayalat having the Burmese Royal lineage, mother of kids, and living in exile in India, and Uma being from an educated elite Bengali family, married to a high-ranked civil servant, both find the colonial power to be objectionably imposing. The official designation of Uma's husband contributes to Uma and her family's meteoric rise in regards of status among circle of relatives. According to him an ideal marriage is one in which both the spouses have equal agencies. He has always dreamed of a happy marriage in which he would explore the greatness of art and literature together with his wife, but unfortunately his wife Uma cannot always match with her husband's too British mental wavelength. Rather she does not want to. She finds the complete forsaking of one's own indigenous cultural identity as a vital loss. And doing what the Collector asks her to do is tantamount to lose her soul. Therefore, the women, are less uninfluenced by the transforming effects of colonialism and are resistant to it because, they can keenly identify the moments of transformation.

The difference between the elite and the subaltern at the transitive moment between feudalism and colonialism

Colonialism functions through both coercion and persuasion. Arjun's case is an example of persuasion. In his joining the army, he has a motive to prove himself to his family. In his research paper, Binayak Roy studies how British colonialism made the colonized, the Indian, in this case, a split personality. In their declared civilizing mission, the colonizers, at times, include a set of select colonized in a "moral and cognitive venture against oppression" (Nandy xiv). Roy defines this as "the intimate enemy" position. He argues that the process transforms him (the colonized or the Indian) and ultimately there is a loss of the self of the native. In the case of the Collector, when

he discovers it, he could not but get rid of it through death. The Collector and the people like him help colonialism with their administrative skills, but a greater mass actually served colonialism with their military skills. In this regard, while describing the kind of work, she is engaged in, Uma tells Dolly that in US, the expatriate Indians try to mobilize a campaign of political awareness against how India is being used by the British as a big garrison to defend Britain and carry on its "eastern campaigns." (221) Lala Hardayal, Uma says, thinks that "Indian peasants are exploited doubly—in indigenous farmlands and in battle fields, both within the country and abroad." (221)

Rajkumar's position is that of a subaltern in the beginning of the novel from where he rises to be a wealthy employer. He is very much industrious and is a self-made successful man in *The Glass Palace*. He succeeds in all of his mercantile ventures. In his last venture, before he leaves for India, he starts stocking teak and to sell them to the British. Teak is in heavy demand at this time for setting up of railway track throughout the country. Mentions of railways come in Ghosh's writing as an ominous reminder of the draconian project of colonialism. In India, the British lie up railway track for smooth transport of agricultural and mineral riches to ultimately send them to England. In Burma, the need was rather martial than mercantile. The countrywide network of railways there, would facilitate the transportation of soldiers as well as the goods for their sustenance in the warfront. Thus Rajkumar actually plans to make money out of war. When Dolly comes to know about this plan, she reviles as it is basically making money out of other people's lives. Nonetheless, Rajkumar sticks to his plan and ultimately meets his nemesis. One day, there is an event of bombing in the city. Rajkumar's elder son, Neel has been overseeing the process of stacking up the piles of teak in their go-down. The deafening noise of bombs disturbs the elephants so much that they start running erratically. Neel gets stampeded and ultimately killed. Rajkumar loses his son and leaves for India a penniless man. Thus here too, though Rajkumar does not have any such impression that an association with the colonial power is a prestige-booster in society, he takes advantage of the capitalist momentum of colonialism.

Rajkumar undergoes a change since he comes in direct contact with colonialism. The collector as it is already mentioned, is so fastidious about the English manners and before every dinner he scrutinizes the table. Dinner etiquettes are given utmost importance. Rajkumar, during his only visit to Ratnagiri finds it stifling to go by the table manners at the Collector's residence. But he also begins to change although initially in a sartorial way. There is one more such moment

when Rajkumar is about to go for a meeting to present his bid for the tender of supplying teak to Chhotanagpur Railways Company. Saya John warns him that far from winning the bid, he would not be let into the director's room, if he goes with his usual attire—longyi and vest. Rajkumar, as he likes to be prepared for every situation in advance has already got a set of European dress of his size stitched. He puts on those and leaves for the meeting and finally gets the tender as well. Actually there are a lot of sartorial shifts in the novel. The Burmese princesses also switch to Indian mode of dressing up, but "no one quite remembered when, they appeared in saris". Thus their change of dress is more naturalized compared to Saya John or Rajkumar or the Collector.

Therefore, we see that Bhabha's "the mimic man" has been a very recurrent image throughout this novel. There are several characters—the Collector, Rajkumar, Saya John, and finally Arjun who try to emulate the British in varying degrees. The public which comes under the influence of colonialism contaminates the honesty and innocence in a person. The more s/he is away from it, the more clear-sighted s/he is. But there is no female character who could be termed as a mimic woman. As the women's position is more distant, physically as well as intellectually from the colonial system, compared to their male counterparts, they are more critical of colonialism.

Dolly is such an example. Queen Supayalat, and to some extent Uma Dey too can observe the changes because they are capable of maintaining an objective distance from the colonial power-centre(s). The male characters who frequent the public sphere more than the women are more influenced and somehow their psyche is irreversibly metamorphosed. In the public domain also, it is the educational system which is the most effective part to bring in the change. The characters' involvement in this sector, therefore, points to his/her level of change. For example, Kishan Singh has been serving in the army for quite some time, and people from his family too served in the army. Thus he has quite a martial background in his family. But compared to Arjun who is a first generation army professional, Kishan Singh's consciousness is less untarnished.

After Arjun gets his job as a commissioned officer in the army, his parents and relatives are somewhat relieved thinking that finally the boy is about to do something. When someone hints at the possibility of a serious injury because of military profession, Arjun's father observes:

> "Nonsense. The chances are very slight. It's just a job like any other. Besides, think of the *status*, the *prestige*…" (p. 258, emphasis added)

Uma's reaction to his prospect of joining the army is quite a surprise to Arjun: "The Mahatma thinks that the country can only benefit from having men of conscience in the army. India needs soldiers who won't blindly obey their superiors…"(258) He cannot read between the lines what Gandhi's thought is actually up to. He is relieved to find his aunt not objecting to his decision. Later on, when he is serving the army in South-East Asia, he realizes his difficulties. He understands that he does not have a solid logical ground to fight for. He is fighting not for his country but for the Empire.

> 'They really believe in what they're doing; they believe that the British stand for freedom and equality. Most of us when we hear big words like that tend to take them with a pinch of salt. They don't. They're deadly serious about these things, and that's why it's so hard for them when they discover that this equality they've been told about is a carrot on a stick—something that dangled in front of their noses to keep them going, but always kept just out of reach.'(*The Glass Palace,* 284)

Arjun, thus does not have any big ideal when he gets the job. He joins the army simply because he is not interested in anything else which could earn him a decent salary as well as social status for his family. But he has already sensed the irony in the big ideals with which they are catechized. He chooses not to see the farce on which the whole system is erected. And the import of what Uma delivers as the take of Gandhi on Indian men's joining the British Indian army is in the awakening of the conscience of such people in the army. In fact, one can see that before before 1947, the independence, there were several cases of mutinies in the army. Singapore Mutiny (1915) and Royal Indian Navy Mutiny (1946) are two of them to mention here.

Therefore, in *The Glass Palace*, we see the differential levels of corroding effect of colonialism on Indians, but Ghosh proves that the most affected are those who are more exposed to the colonial educational system—the native administrative officials, and the native officers in the army. In reality also, we see that most of the mutinies in the British Indian army were started by the sepoys, who were, most of the times, unlettered. For the elite people, the Enlightenment

ideals which they are taught in the colonial education system give a message of equality, but in practice, they experience the opposite.

Flood of Fire

Flood of Fire (2015) is Amitav Ghosh's most recent novel and is the last part of *Ibis trilogy.* According to the critics and reviewers, there are a lot of (improbable) coincidences in it. Opium Trade is a running thread in this novel like the earlier two novels of the trilogy, but Ghosh focuses a lot on the internal dynamics of British Indian army and the related social impact of it. In this section of the chapter, I would discuss the transition from feudal to colonial system and its related effect on contemporary Indian society specially the military sector.

Transition from the Mughal to the British era

The time-frame of early colonialism in India is a much debated issue. The historians from the Subaltern Studies group and the Chicago School offer varied opinions on this issue. Some say that in the early days of flourishing hegemony of British East India Company, much of Mughal traditions were sustained. David Washbrook shows in his work that by 1840 the colonial regime became successful enough to establish its hegemony in economy. (Washbrook, 2004) Barrow and Hayens observe that the social norms prevalent in late 18th century and early 20th century were going through a transitional phase. In many ways, the influences of Mughal traditions were discernible, and in some areas, European modernity made its inroads. Ghosh captures the moment of transition between the Mughal period and the British Imperialism. David Washbrook marks two discernible features of this transition as "peasantization" and "traditionalism". These two changes, according to Washbrook, facilitated British colonization. (Barrow and Hayens, 472)

In *Flood of Fire*, Bhim, Kesri's brother joins the Mughal Army and Kesri goes to the East India Company Army. There is almost a conviction that the British militarized certain races of India through their Martial Race theory. I argue here that though the Martial Race theory did exist, certain races of India were partly militarized even during the pre-colonial time. And Ghosh's

description of Kesri's rural household, in which we see two brothers vying each other to join the military profession simply reflects that precolonial trend.

I also try to prove in the discussion of this novel here that the military during the colonial regime in India was a system which can be read as a microcosm of the larger picture of British administration. For example there were certain introduced and practised strategies or policies within the army which they later applied in the civil sphere too. Ghosh shows that all the features which are generally identified as typical colonial features of administration were very much present in the army from the very beginning of the formation of British East India Army. I also show that it is not only the British who tried to change the Indian sensibilities, but the Indian way too brought certain changes into the British way of thinking.

Reading the Indian sepoy as a historical subject

Shahid Amin, in his essay "Historian's Dilemma" observes that the problem in constructing an alternative narrative of the documented history specially of the colonial times is that the judicial and nationalistic hegemony almost buried all other voices so completely in most cases, that they could not be interred anymore. (Amin, 130) Ghosh tries to excavate such an area of colonial India—the Indian sepoys in the British Indian Army. But the mode, Ghosh subscribes to do this job is in continuation with his trend of choosing the individual against the backdrop of a system or nation. Through the eyes of Kesri, a soldier in the East India Company Army, we see the time specially the dialogic relation between the East and the West—the Orient and the Enlightenment modernity of the West. Ian J. Barrow and Douglas E. Haynes observe that some critics put doubt on the British colonialists' influence in changing the cultural structure of indigenous Indian society because of the agency of the Indian elites. Ghosh shatters that myth by portraying the power dynamics between the Indian zamindars and the British merchants through the character of Raja Neelrattan Halder in *Sea of Poppies*. Neel, although is from the elite section, loses everything and is exiled. Before that, we see that he has tried to learn about the colonizers: both their culture and their language.

Historians or the military historians primarily try to analyze the "esprit de corps or the corporate consciousness in the system of British Indian army. In order to do that they take into account the casteist bonds within different regiments in Indian Army. It should be noted here that

the Wetsern/ British military strategy which was purely secular underwent a gross change in the Indian subcontinent. The linguistic, cultural, and communal differences within the population led the authority to form different regiments according to the colonizers' theories about different races and castes of India. These theories kept on getting revised with time. For example, the Pathans, as David Omissi shows, were portrayed as very barbaric in the colonizers' primary assessment. Later on, the impression improved a lot and they were described as very much suitable for military job because of their physical finesse, the tribal democratic system they hailed from, and their martial ability. The assessment changed again during the World War I, when large occurrences of desertion of the Pathans were reported. That very tribal democratic nature now went against their suitability in an army. "Accusations were made that the frontier Pathan was racially incapable of fully realizing that military discipline superseded 'tribal loyalties'. (Singh,Gajendra, 27)

Conforming to his tradition of telling micro history or individual's history against the grand narrative of collective history and memory, Ghosh builds the character of a sepoy named Kesri serving in the British East India Company army. The functioning of the army as well as the first Opium War are depicted chiefly through the perspective of Kesri. Ghosh captures the internal turmoil of an Indian soldier over serving the British in his earlier novel *The Glass Palace* (2000). In *Flood of Fire,* Ghosh shows how the martial strategies as well as the very spirit in the construction of an army underwent a huge change as a result of cultural encounter. The conversation between Ram Singh who is Kesri's father and Bhyro Singh reveals how the perceptions about martial strategies changed in Indians. Ram Singh refers to the Battle of Assaye that when some good fighters proposed to have one-to-one fight and no one from the Company Army stepped out: "There was not one *man* in their entire army who was brave enough to be a *real* bahadur!" (71, Emphases added) Thus if Ram Singh can be taken as a representative of the pre-colonial indigenous martial fraternity, then it can be inferred that they think the colonial martial strategy to have had an emasculating effect on Indians.

While the various armies of the different princely states or, for that matter, the Mughal army were highly decentralized, the British East India Army had a very centralized construction. Bhyro Singh explains this to be the difference which makes the Company Army invincible in contemporary battles. According to Bhyro Singh, the sepoys in Company army are accountable to their immediate bosses and this chain of hierarchy runs from the very top to a single sepoy in a

linear fashion. The tradition of individual heroism was not encouraged anymore in the Company army but it was constructed in such a pattern that every soldier would act as a part of a whole machinery—or to be more precise, a mere cog in the machine. Thus individual heroism or cowardice would not matter much in achieving the supreme result which is victory.

Colonizers purifying the natives

At one point, Bhyro Singh asserts:"The British are purifying Hindustan." Thus the very notion of purity, Ghosh shows, is not an Oriental concept but was a Western idea. The statement can be supported by the instances of the British policy of meticulously following the Sikh rituals even in the army—in order to keep the Sikhs pure, and save them from the contagions of superstitious Hindus. Here I would think it fit to cite Lata Mani's observation on Indian tradition, though Mani's context is different. She observes that during the colonial time, "Indian traditions" were often "reconstituted". (Mani, Contentious Traditions, 121) She also observes that "….,this privileging of brahmanic scripture and the equation of tradition with scripture is, …, an effect of a colonial discourse on India. (Mani, "Contentious Traditions", 122) Mani acknowledges a possible break at the time of transition between precolonial and colonial time, but she does not identify this break to cause a complete discontinuity between precolonial and colonial eras.

Heather Streets shows that the Highlanders' martial valour during the Mutiny of 1857 which garnered much accolade from the British population stationed in India as well as Britain, used to be looked down upon by the British even a century earlier. The recruitment of the Scottish people into the British army and then the writings, specially of James MacPherson's *Ossian* and Walter Scot's novels revived and glorified the Scottish culture in such a way that it "aroused British Romantic sensibilities" about the Scottish people and culture. The revival of ritualistic practices in the army among all the communities (Hindu, Muslim, and the Sikhs) with the support of the British authority reflects somewhat this history. Eric Hobsbawm too asserts that many traditions, in reality, are not old traditions but are created in the name of retaining historic or cultural roots and then are gradually assimilated into cultural folds of history.

The purification agenda of the British can also be read as a newly constructed tradition which was very much suitable divide and rule policy. For the sake of insulating a particular caste, or community or sect from the influence of others, the British authority took utmost care to maintain the separation between communities. David Omissi observes such endeavours in a different context though, of the British as plan of dīvide et īmpera: The British were rarely reluctant to seize a chance to divide and rule…" (Omissi, 97) Besides inspiring the Sikh rituals, the Muslim soldiers as well as their families were given special pilgrimage allowances. (Omissi, 100)

Heather Streets shows that the Sikh soldiers attracted huge public attention in Britain for displaying exemplary loyalty towards the British authority at the time of the rebellion of 1857. Consequently the British media lavished the Sikh religion with accolades: (the Sikh religion)

> "which is by far the purest and freest from the burden of forms and ritual of any in India." (as quoted by Streets, 63) The absence of so-called caste system, and rituals and superstitions among the Sikhs, compared to the Hindus, according to the British made them characteristically different and better than the Hindus. (Streets, 63)

The sepoys were promised of a euphoria in the regiment, both in station and action. In station they are assured of their bodily needs—that too without "losing" their caste. In *Flood of Fire*, we see that Bhyro Singh assures that it is taken care of that even when the sepoys visit the red light area of the army camp, they do not lose their castes. The action, joining the Company army is depicted in a way to give them a feel of adventure into the wide wild world.

Legitimizing the choice of soldiery as a profession has always been a tricky issue. The most practical reason for opting this profession is monetary security. Yet, unlike many other professions, there has been a practice of encircling it with an aura of glory. Emphasizing on the economic bindings as the primary motivating force, Omissi observes that "A martial identity also helped men choose between the army and other non-agricultural options, …" (74) There is an age-old practice/tendency to associate concepts like sacrifice, courage, patriotism with war. The association is naturally inducted to the profession of soldiery as well. Omer Bartov observes that for the Western colonial culture it was necessary to cast a heroic spell around the subject of warfare in order to legitimize their expansionist political stand. (*Murder in Our Midst*, 16) This could be a theoretical point of departure because in lands which were colonized, also existed a tradition of

glorified warfare. Modern warfare can be defined as a modified version of man's instinct to protect his own property or anything he feels attached to against usurpers. Although this definition explains the expansionist nature of the colonialists, it cannot explain the psychological complexity embedded in the issue of the Indian sepoys serving in the British Indian army. At this point, one should remember that the sepoys who serve in the East India Company army of late 18th century or early 19th century and those who served in the British Indian army in the 20th century have a large ideological difference. Gajendra Singh beautifully elucidates the differing degrees of submission and resistance in the mindscape of Indian soldiers. As Singh describes, Huntington observes that the very process of formation of an army or a battalion attributes an insularity in terms of political maneuverings. The institutionalization claims a degree of loyalty from all the members of an army and it counters the possibilities of resistance and insurgency. Although Finer harbours a different notion than that of Huntington, they agree at one point that the life in army is very much different from that of civilians' lives.

The material gain which motivated the peasants to join the army and then the promise to irrigate those geographical pockets of the country which send formidable number of soldiers to the British Indian army may give a rather oblique impression about the Indian sepoys. They look like "mercenary force." Ghosh shows that the relations and customs prevalent in the civil society were exploited in the army to maintain strict discipline. It is understandable from this fact that the very use of these issues will not let the army be immune from political insurgency. What was missing to the British authority to imbricate the peasant soldiers' consciousness was any fitting theory which could ethically legitimize their service. There was nothing which would convince them about their existential danger from the opponents in the battlefield. The only issue the British officers could raise in order to inspire the sepoys to fight was primarily booty and then the promise of a martial glory their families would bask in, in future. They could not resort to any sort of idealism to inspire the soldiers for fighting. Trotsky's observation on the peasants joining the army is worth-citing here:

> "In order to lift the peasantry to the level of a state and of an army, the hand of someone else over them is needed. Among the Whites it is the nobility, the landlords and the bourgeois officers…Among us the directing role is played by the officers who attract the peasantry, organize it and lead it forward." (Trotsky, *Military Writings*, p.82)

Gajendra Singh has observed that much of the theories related to the military dissent among the Indian soldiers in British colonial army do not give much weightage to the individulas-i.e. the members of the rank and file. It precisely means that an individual's subjectivity does not contain much as to incite a state of insurgency in their writings. The soldiers are often portrayed as groups or a collectivity. The reason behind this trend of considering the Indian soldiers as a faceless collectivity might point to the scanty historical resources-specially the letters or diaries, or any such document which registers a person's thought process.

Amitav Ghosh could claim credit for reconstructing several such persons whom history treats as faceless collectivity. He did a lot of research for writing this part of the novel. Even he gives samples of letters written by Indian sepoys in China. The soldier's letters echo the words written in letters of many soldiers who served in World War I in Europe. He deftly captures an Indian peasant's fear of homesickness in anticipation of a sea voyage.

MacMunn expresses his surprise over the Indian soldiers' agreement to serve the army in exchange of quite a paltry amount of pension and perquisite. There is a trend that huge number of recruits come from regions which are less fertile or sparsely irrigated. "The bulk of the Jat recruits come from the unirrigated villages of the district, the demand for agricultural labour being too great, and its return too sure, to tempt many men from the [prosperous] canal tracts." (*Punjab District Gazetteer*, Vol. III A: Rohtak District, 1910, p.167) Ghosh too points out in *Flood of Fire* that families which do not have much land are likely to send their sons to armies, so that with the salaries of the sons, they would buy more land. When Kesri remits his salary to the family, he mentions that there should be purchases of new lands with the money.

Indian sepoys and kinship relations within the colonial army

While British authority believed and glorified the strategy of keeping different castes and communitites apart within the army, the kinship relations brought a lot of problems to an individual sepoy too. Kesri has to go through a lot of humiliations and is almost compelled to agree to the marriage proposal of Bhyro Singh's crippled and impotent nephew for his sister, Deeti because of the casteist structure of the Company army. Therefore, when he gets the opportunity to work with the volunteers going for the First Opium War,

"…Kesri discovered that there were some advantages to working with a motley crowd of balamteers: since these men were not related to each other, as in a regular sepoy battalion, there were no meddlesome cousins and uncles to be taken into account. The could be harassed, ghabraoed, and punished at will, without having to answer to their relatives." *(Flood of Fire*, 228)

But soon afterwards, when a bunch of volunteers from other regiments arrive and Kesri finds that these people are the unwanted troublemakers of other regiments, he realizes the advantage of kinship within the army: " …since there were no cousins and uncles around to intervene before quarrels got out of hand, petty disagreements frequently escalated into fights." *(Flood of Fire*, 229)

Therefore the kinship relation worked both as a cohesive force and as a risk of nepotism. Marxist theories related to the political engagement of soldiers in an army cannot explain the case of colonial Indian army because the theories discuss only the aspect of class: in the West, as I have already quoted Trotsky, the peasants generally used to join as soldiers and the officers were chosen from elite bourgeois class. In India, there is a racial difference between the soldiers and the officers. The time depicted in this novel is the beginning of the British army in India and we see that the British authority relied most on the Indian subedars as the potential recruiters. Bhyro Singh roams in villages to find out able bodied young men who would make good soldiers. But there are certain subtle things in the process of recruitment. The physical capability is not the only feature which determines the person's selection, but the background of the person should be such that the new recruit would obey him. Therefore, the discipline and obedience mandatory to retain the cohesion of a battalion is assured by choosing people from the same clan.

The native subalterns measuring up the sahibs

Ghosh also shows in this novel, that the native soldier identifies the habitual difference between him and his master to be the cause of their difference in hierarchy,

"A wise old subedar had once said to Kesri: It's alcohol that gives the sahibs their strength; that's why they drink it from morning to night— if ever they stop they will become weak

and go into decline. And if a day comes when they start taking ganja, like we do, then you can be sure that their empire will be finished." (*Flood of Fire*, 278)

One of the soldiers, fighting on the European soil in the World War I, writes to his friend in India, "The white peppers are more hot than the red ones." Having the knowledge that their letters would go through a rigorous censoring process, they are careful about using code words to mention delicate issues. (Omissi, *Letters*) Thus it is evident that the native Indians did not acknowledge the valour and martial ability of the British men in India as an unconditional expression of their masculinity. Taking this notion harboured by Kesri in *Flood of Fire* as a point of departure, I argue that it is not only the colonial British who classified the Indian population racially according to the performative quality of masculinity, but the Indians also measured their colonial masters on the same term. Not only that, this notion also reveals a side of the intricate relation between the idea of gender and masculinity. The Indian sepoy, therefore, it seems, does not have a very high esteem for their British masters. The White masculinity, according to Kesri, or a person like him, is not an intrinsic quality, but is dependent on as paltry an external agent as alcohol. Moreover, in a hypothetical situation in which the alcohol is replaced with ganja, their manhood would undergo a downfall and the empire would be lost.

In another instance, just before the army embark on their voyage to China, they start anticipating how the expedition would be. Somehow they gather that the Chinese people, in their physical features, resemble the Gurkhas. This piece of information scares them because many of them have either experienced or shared the memory of the East India Company Army's battle with the Gurkha state. The memory of the British army's humiliation at the hands of Gurkhas has shaken the sepoys. Therefore, Ghosh shows here that the colonial masters in spite of their cultural, martial influences, could not secure the reputation of supreme martial excellence in Indian minds. (252)

A Subaltern's dilemma over participating in the colonial expansion

The lacuna in the ideological realm of these sepoys, if there was any, was that there was no nationalist ideal for which they fought. Whether nationalism is good or bad or, for that matter, necessary is not the point here, but in case of retaining an army, there must be a strong ideological morale, besides the monetary allurement, which would work as a cohesive force to hold the men together. And in the East India Company army, or later in the British Indian army, there was none.

Kesri feels this void when he kills a Chinese soldier in the war. The expression in the dead soldier's open eyes reminds him of his lack of any real cause to fight:

> "When he had pulled out his dripping sword, Kesri saw that the man's eyes were still open. For the few seconds of life that remained to him, the man fixed his gaze on Kesri. His expression was one that Kesri had seen before, on campaigns in the Arakan and the hills of eastern India—he knew it to be the look that appears on men's faces when they fight for their land, their homes, their families, their customs, everything they hold dear. …it struck Kesri that in a lifetime of soldiering he had never known what it was to fight in that way- the way his father had fought at Assaye—for something that was your own; …" (*Flood of Fire*, 472)

Thus in this novel, when, after the defeat of the Chinese side in the first Opium War, the Chinese point to the Indian sepoys as the chief determining factor for their defeat and questioned the legitimacy of the agency of these people in the war, Neel sadly reveals the unfathomable pity which lies in the role of these sepoys that they killed more people in India than outside India for their White masters.

Colonialism and changes of social values

"Scholars as diverse as Zygmunt Bauman, Gotz Aly, Susanne Heim, and Detlev Peukert have recently contended that scientific and technological advances eroded the ethical foundations of societies that embraced modernity by either producing intrinsically destructive forms of rational knowledge or delivering the tools to implement previously inconceivable crimes." (Batrov, *Mirrors of Destruction, 283*) This situation aptly explains Bhyro Singh's argument against Ram Singh's decision to send his son to join the Mughal army. The war of Assaye was won by the East India Company. Indians so far relied more on heroic endeavour shown in wars than victory or loss. Bhyro Singh, who relies more on mechanical precision, foregrounds the issue of victory and defeat as the only and primary issue. Ashis Nandy observes that though the Indians did not entirely subscribe to the middle-class British idea of the hyper-masculine martial race theory, having loyalty to their masters—somehow the martial race theory partly stokes a part of latent Indian tradition which would extol the warrior culture. (Nandy, 7)

Therefore, the novel asserts the dichotomy between the public and the private by the colonizers as well as the indigenous reformers which accentuated the line of demarcation between masculinity and femininity in Indian society though in precolonial society these two terms were more "fluid." That politics is a masculine sphere is strictly a Western concept. And with colonialism this concept seeped into the Indians' psyche. I argue that through introspective vacillations in Kesri, or the conversations between sepoys about their masters, Ghosh tries to show that the subaltern soldier still retained a part of his self, compared to his elite Indian counterpart as they participate in the colonizing process with the brawn only, not with their brains.

Conclusion

Ashis Nandy observes that colonialism takes the colonized people to a precarious condition in which, when they understand the very procedure of the functioning of the system and specially how it psychologically work on them, they feel inclined to fight back. The problem is that sometimes it is the very colonial education which makes them aware of its psychological maneuvering. Arjun, in *The Glass Palace*, at one point of time discovers that there is nothing left in him which he can dissociate his self from all his colonial acquirement, which he can claim to be his very own, indigenous, Indian. He discovers that he, along with the entire population of India has become irretrievably colonized. In order to uphold the Western socially acceptable stereotype of sexuality, colonialism foregrounds masculinity as an instrument of dominance "over women and femininity" in every possible praxis. (Nandy, 4) Nandy also observes that in the British Indian Army, the British were particularly careful that the indigenous system of hierarchy—religious, social, communal should be retained. And he also refers to one occasion when the army gained monetarily from the revenues of a temple established by them. (*Intimate Enemy*, 5)

Militarization of certain races in India made those races culturally dependent on the valorized masculinity of warfare—e.g. the Gurkhas, the Punjabis, the Jats, the Pathans etc. Although Nandy and many other scholars observe that the desired concept of masculinity, according to the Western colonizers was secular and Christian, Ghosh shows that there were ample occasions which showed to a sharp deviation from the Western standard:

> Before Captain Mee goes to fight a duel with another British offier, Kesri, his orderly oils and cleans Mee's pistols and and then "as was the custom" takes the weapon to the temple

> of the camp and keeps them at the feet of the deity and makes the priest conduct a puja for the weapon. He even puts a vermilion tika on Mee's forehead before the duel. Mee in this case of a Western person's belief in the Oriental ways and customs, which were often addressed as superstitions, is in the middle. He cannot object to have the tika on his forehead, nor he wants it to be displayed and takes care that it is concealed by his locks.

Ghosh also shows that the notion that the Indians had an unflinching conviction/belief over the supremacy of British masculinity and their martial power is not true. In fact, he presents the very contradiction of it. Bhyro Singh who always champions the cause of the British for their military prowess has his opponents too. Just before the Bengal volunteers set about their voyage to China, the sepoys have a wide range of conjectures about the impending occurrences. The very information that the Chinese people resemble the Gurkhas physically shakes them because it reminds them the fierce exhibition of the Gurkha soldiers' martial acumen against the British troop in the Battle of Nalapani. (1814) There is also a rumour that the Chinese have supernatural power and their mastery of occult would make them invincible. Kesri, being a subedar, can neither entertain nor encourage such stories, but in his heart he knows that there are inexplicable things which may support or go against one during a battle. At this point, Ghosh offers a fine situation when Kesri has a mental debate with the Western tradition of rational thinking. The British defines this inexplicable factor as 'luck' or "chance." According to Kesri, these are mere interventions of "kismat"—an unknown force which the material world or beings have no control over. And he also questions: "…if the Angrezes really believed that supernatural and divine forces played no part in war, then why did they go to their churches to pray on the eve of a battle? Why did they allow their orderlies to take their weapons to the temple to be blessed?" (253) Ghosh's mastery is that he teaches the readers to see or study the colonial Indian martial force not as a collectivity. By building the character of Kesri, he tries to give a hint of the agency or the voice of the subaltern (nominally the real subaltern in this case).

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The time-frame captured by Amitav Ghosh in his novels is wide. While the *Ibis trilogy* covers the pre-Sepoy Mutiny (1857) colonial period, *The Calcutta Chromosome* depicts the late 19th century through flashbacks. *The Glass Palace* (2000) again covers more than a century: from the abdication of King Thebaw (the last King of Burma till the 1990s when Burma was ruled by the military junta and Aung San Suu Kyi was under house-arrest. *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Hungry Tide* (2004) span through various periods of postcolonial India. This thesis examines how Ghosh showcases the conditions and stakes of the subaltern people and their agency in various historical-political situations. Therefore, in his novels, we see the journey of the subaltern from the colonial to the postcolonial time, although it is not so, if we arrange his novels according to the dates of their publications. The novels (*Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2015)) which depict the most distant past so far are his most recent novels, while his earlier novels (*The Circle of Reason, The Shadow Lines, The Hungry Tide*) take up the era we are currently in. I read this posterior movement through time in Ghosh's novels as his rejection of the linear narrative pattern of historiography. In an interview given to Neluka Silva in 1997, Ghosh himself identified that a "Christianizing impulse" to "systemize history" gave birth to Jewish history in 19th century Germany. He hints at the academically reconstructed Jewish history which gravely influenced international politics afterwards.

While in his novels, Ghosh depicts the colonial and the postcolonial time, in his most celebrated non-fiction, *In An Antique Land* (1992), he draws a picture of the 11th century trade between India and Egypt in a pre-colonial time. One of the most prominent characters in this text is Bomma-a Malabar slave working for his Jewish master. Unlike the novels, all the characters in *In An Antique Land* are not fictional. The characters of *In An Antique Land* are either the people whom Ghosh stayed with during his Ph.D. or people whom he came to know about from the Geniza documents archived in various universities in US and UK. He has recreated these characters as well as their history through his archival research. The commonality among these real characters and his fictional characters is that he tries to capture the individuality in them. He poses this individuality against the backdrop of a historical time. And because the events and narrations often move back and forth through time, the readers can have two different types of perspectives—

futuristic (if the past is taken as the point of departure) and retrospective (if the present or more recent time captured in the text is considered). Thus, he draws quite a comprehensive picture of any time through this comparative mode of temporal shifts. Padmini Mongia observes that

> "…, Ghosh poses a postcolonial challenge via the pre-colonial […]. Although European colonialism and imperialism have been written as having a historical inevitability to them, Ghosh's precolonial world questions that inevitability. The world he creates reveals the possibility of futures and histories other than the one we have come to regard as inevitable. (Mongia, 84-85)

David Arnold observes that Gramsci's understanding of the peasant subalternity is based on his understanding of the Italian peasants and he regards them not as an autonomous mass, but always in relation to their subordination to the bourgeois, the landed gentry, and the administrative officials. Gramsci emphasizes on the unity of the urban proletariat and the rural peasants and he expects the revolution which would overturn the elite bourgeois from their superordinate ruling position to come through the unity of these two subordinate sections. Gramsci also points out that the subalterns have two sets of qualities-positivist and negativist. While he finds the positive traits in the political cultural realm, he identifies passivity, disunity, spontaneity to be the negative qualities of the peasant consciousness. According to him, the subalterns have no sense of autonomy and it is only the prerogative of the hegemonic classes. (Arnold, 30-31) My reading of the subaltern characters in Amitav Ghosh's novels do not always agree with Gramsci's reading of the subaltern people. In his novels, the subalterns do not vocally articulate their claims and choices. They cannot rule over the circumstances but they are utterly agile to adapt according to the changing circumstances. One can read this flexible nature in them as a sign of malleability, but in some ways they retain some traces of their selves which the elites cannot. Arjun or the Collector can be compared with Kishan Singh in *The Glass Palace.* The sense of loss of the self is more intense and unbearable in the first two characters than that of the last one. The stand of this thesis, in this regard is in agreement with what Ranajit Guha observes in the Introduction to *Subaltern Studies I*:

> Parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes… This was an

> *autonomous* domain…far from being destroyed or rendered virtually ineffective… it continued to operate vigorously… adjusting itself to the conditions prevailing under Raj. (Guha, 4)

Anirban Biswas reads the subaltern consciousness thus: "Under semi-feudal socio-economic conditions, peasant insurgencies are inevitably limited by perceptions about ethnicity and lineage, as well as by a sense of belonging to a common habitat." Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak too cautions against the trap of putting this collective subaltern consciousness which is very much specific to its ethnicity and "territoriality" into the category of "pre-political" as rendered by Hobsbawm. (*The Spivak Reader*, 295)

Ghosh also proves that the pre-colonial or colonial third world subalterns were not "pre-political." Hobsbawm designates the colonial intervention as a moment of political transition for the third world subalterns. In Ghosh's texts, we see that the female characters are less influenced or not influenced at all by colonialism compared to their male counterparts. The reason is partly because of their not comeing in direct contact with the academic, judiciary, military any other such systems which were governed by the colonizers. So if we assume colonialism to be the giver of political consciousness to the third world subalterns, then these women (the colonized female characters e.g. Deeti, Dolly, Uma) should remain in a "pre-political" stage, but contrarily, Ghosh's female characters are the most alert observers of the political and social transitions.

Besides History, the thesis also discusses how Ghosh portrays the hegemony of Western science in the colonized lands. In *The Circle of Reason*, *The Calcutta Chromosome,* and later, partly in *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke,* Ghosh gives a picture of the indigenous pre-colonial system of scientific knowledge. I have shown in the context of Ghosh's novels, how the colonial hegimonizing process aimed at limiting science and knowledge to the academic sphere. The common knowledge about malaria-bearing mosquito among urban and rural Indians, the use of indigenous herbs and folk medicine of India, and such other folk healing system were systematically displaced by academic Western science. The thesis reads these instances as sites of epistemic violence.

The thesis proves the existence and possibilities of dialogic relations between the center and the margin in today's condition as it is described in *The Hungry Tide.* In this case, what the thesis finds almost echoes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's identification of today's subalterns. In "The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview," Spivak claims that today's subaltern "is no longer cut-off" from the center. S/he has various means to reach the center. (326) In the third chapter, my discussion of *The Hungry Tide* shows how the subalterns try to reach the center and for that they search suitable intermediaries from media and civil society. My thesis shows that in spite of the availability of intermediaries and interpreters between the margin/subaltern and the center, the subaltern's speech cannot always be exactly conveyed. The reasons are various: the subaltern's unwillingness, the interpreter's inability to grasp the import of the words etc. There are times when a translation is impossible. The message or meaning which is hidden behind the mere words does not spring out of the mere syntactical order, but it bears a history of a place and a community. It captures such an essence which is lost as soon as it tries to shift the linguistic/cultural barrier/ border. For example in *The Hungry Tide,* we see that Kanai, asked by Piya to translate Fokir's folk song, cannot do it in spite of his proficiency in six languages. This chapter also shows that despite a dialogic relation between the subaltern and the center, and the center's increasing interest (both academic and political) in the subaltern, most of the times, the statist policies cannot or rather choose not to cater to the needs of the subaltern population.

In the thesis, I have also shown how Ghosh creates many moments of silence on the part of the subaltern characters in his texts. Some critics (e.g. Priya Kumar) identify this silence as an instance of failing the subaltern in articulating his/her agency. Contrarily, I read these moments to be profoundly meaningful. Silence cannot always be the sign of helplessness or powerlessness, but they can also mean resistance and refusal. Additionally, Ghosh also shows how marginality is not only an economic or casteist or racial issue, but depending on the situation any person can sense himself/herself to be marginal. There are many such characters (e.g. Piya in *The Hungry Tide*, Beni Prasad Dey, the Collector in *The Glass Palace*, Neel Rattan Halder in the *Ibis Trilogy*) who in spite of their wealth, education, and higher social standing, find themselves to be marginalized by circumstances. Thus this motely characterization and the focus on marginality rather than the marginal (the subaltern) save his texts from being "community manifesto."[1] I argue that because he does not try to co-opt the subject position of the subalterns, he does not act as a mouthpiece of the subalterns. Recovering the subaltern subject and dissociating it from the collective subaltern

consciousness are much debated issues in Subaltern Studies. Gyanendra Pandey shows that Guha, in his reading of Abdul Majid's diary, finds that the collective consciousness in a subaltern shifts very often. Guha gives several evidences from the diary that the subaltern's allegiance with his religious community or the inhabitants of that locality is not steadfast. (117-19) Therefore, if the subaltern consciousness is attempted to be kept limited to a specific discursive and definitive trope, it grossly violates the subaltern's real consciousness. My thesis shows how Amitav Ghosh singles out individual subalterns and historically situates them in his novels. He shows how the subalterns feel a collective consciousness but the collectivity too keeps on changing. As for example in *Sea of Poppies,* Deeti belongs to several subaltern categories—a woman, poor, a *daughter's* mother, a widow, an amateur practitioner of folk medicine, and then an indentured coolie woman. Ghosh creates her as an individual person but shows that she moves in different realms of subalternity.

Through the differences between perceptions of a civilian and a military/paramilitary person regarding nationalism and imperialism, we can see a comparative picture of how these ideas evolved over time. In *The Shadow Lines*, Tha'amma vociferously supports the idea of nationalist and patriotic ideology is juxtaposed with that of the communally charge-up rioters. With this example Ghosh shows the problem in essentializing national identity. In the *Shadow Lines*, through the character of Robi, Ghosh broaches the issue of ideological militancy also. In fact, the desertion of Indian sepoys and officers from the British Indian army to join Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army in South East Asia in *The Glass Palace,* can also be cited as an example of the colonized military men's dilemma about their allegiance. The fifth chapter (comprising *The Glass Palace* and *Flood of Fire*) briefly discusses the awakening of a sense of resistance against imperialism and dilemma in a subaltern military personnel (Kesri Singh), when he sees the fiercely expressive eyes of a dying Chinese soldier during the first Opium War. He begins to ask himself the question who or what he is fighting for.

Tabish Khair observes that the problem in the methodology of recovering the subaltern subject is that by forsaking the Western classical historicism, one enters the trap of assuming "the self-originating, self-determining individual." (Khair, 23) The historian thus faces the "issues of subjectivity and agency." (Khair, 191) Thus, s/he has to fill up many vacant spaces and moments

of silence with events and words. In that eventfulness and verbosity, created by the historian, it is difficult to recover the subaltern as "a conscious human subject-agent."[2] Here, as an author of fiction, Amitav Ghosh could do what is not always possible or feasible for a historian which is to recover the subaltern subject. As an author, Ghosh is aware of this privilege and the related responsibilities too. He reflects on it in an interview given to Mahmood Kooria:

> "For me, seeing the past through the prism of a character allows me to understand some aspects of the past that historians don't deal with. But, I must admit that doing this would not be possible if historians had not laid the foundations."

But what Ghosh writes is not completely fictitious. In the same interview, Ghosh asserts that as a novelist he does not create his character out of void, the creation too has a process:

> "Imagination is not a sort of floating essence. Imagination begins from particular points in space and time. For me, doing research often sparks the stories; it sparks my ideas. It starts from there, and it goes on from there. So I cannot separate imagination from research as such. And in the case of my recent novels I had to do a lot of historical research because nobody else had done it. I mean historians had not done it."

By exhuming the subaltern past, he throws light on the changes colonial capitalism brought in for the South and South-East Asian society. Opium, coolie, knowledge, *Plasmodium vivax*—all of them are transported along the motely crowd Ghosh peoples his novels with.

As for future scope, this thesis directs to a more explorative discursive field of a dialogue between the margin and the centers of power. In the third chapter, this idea is briefly discussed. In today's time, when we see that an aggressive corporate interest is influencing the state, politics, and media, the dialogic relation between the center and the margin becomes conspicuous both in academics and praxis. This issue can be explored with various theoretical approaches in larger political and social context. Amitav Ghosh is currently addressing the issue of the subaltern as a victim of climate change in his writings. His latest book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) which is a non-fiction touches upon this issue.

In "Deconstructing Historiography," Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak warns that the essentialization of the subaltern in academia by scholars and historians. However, today there is a

surge of foregrounding the subalterns' ethnic or cultural or territorial or religious identity for more political and media recognitions. This tendency of emphasizing on one particular facet of subaltern people's identity along the lines of caste or nationality has been termed as "strategic essentialism." The role of media and the mainstream politics (of India and abroad) in stoking such movements and how it apparently gives a look of shifting the center of power towards the subaltern quarter can be another fertile area of research. This collective consciousness of today's subalterns in terms of ethnicity which helps them in forging a dialogue with various centers of power can also be read against Gramsci's reading of the subalterns.

Notes:

[1] Kumar, Raj. I have borrowed this phrase from Raj Kumar's *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity*, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, in which he observes that because of too much emphasis on the collective experiences and details of the sufferings of her community in Bama's *Karukku* "*Karukk*u reads like a community manifesto rather than an autobiographical narrative of a single individual." (2010, 229)

[2] Khair, Tabish. *Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels.* Oxford University Press, 2005. P. 196

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