

**History, Memory and the Immemorial: An Analysis of Amitav Ghosh's
Fiction**

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by

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Introduction

South Asian Fiction in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been undergoing numerous changes as theories and philosophies of power and its appendages have been re-configured with the birth of new nations, the death of older superpowers and the fluctuating contours of History and politics, all converging together into a problematic synthesis. While the question of imagined communities and how they shape the nation space have been one of the primary question that has been explored in the fiction from the subcontinent, post the 1980s there has been a shift in the lens of the investigation as the postcolonial self no longer remained interested in answering back or questioning the colonial narratives at face value, constricting themselves into the self-same binaries of us and them.

Amitav Ghosh with both his fictional and non-fictional work have been one of the major proponents of this concept of the new postcolonial self who desires to read against the grain of archival history and bring to light the myriad stories and narratives which have been lost in time, falling through the cracks of causal historical documents. Ghosh's novels, eight of them to be exact, have all critically engaged with the questions of belonging, the power of the state, the element of statelessness that haunts the disenfranchised in the political sphere and most importantly, have tried to envisage new ways of inclusive policies which will bring in the till now unaccommodated stories and narratives of all those who have been forgotten or forcibly withdrawn from History into the arena of the seen and the remembered.

This thesis aims to explore Ghosh's fictional works through the lens of the new directions that postcolonial writing has invested itself in. Moving away from the European model of understanding the nation-state and its characteristics, there is now concentrated effort to comprehend the politics that creates the discourse of differences on which the whole of subcontinent's politics and sense of belonging hinges on. Before delving further into the many aims of this work, it is first imperative to ground the concepts which will act as the foundation for its explorations. The three words in the title, 'History', 'Memory' and the 'Immemorial', even though seem disparate, antithetical and forcibly brought together but share among them a long association through which identity politics has played itself out in the Indian subcontinent and its neighbours.

History which makes the claim of being both the story and the story-maker has often functioned as an ideological apparatus that contours itself to be a self- projection onto the

past of those individuals and institutions that have the power to write it. The word 'History' when traced back to its etymological origin, is described as 'an account of *one's* inquiries'¹, thus pre-empting the biased nature of this enterprise which ironically professes to be just and neutral. Just like all stories it is the speculative haunt of the self where differences are smothered, where discrepant world views are all ironed out into the causal linearity of '...and this is how it began and ended'. This act of archiving, or of narrating the 'story' of the past has always been an act of privilege of the powerful. Jacques Derrida in his *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression*, deliberately goes back to the origin of the word 'archive', *Arkhé* in which the antithetical ideas of commencement and commandment embrace in a moment of absolute unity, and in this manner he demonstrates the archive as a privileged site of topography. He elucidates how the act of historicizing or archiving is not merely retelling the fables of the past but re-enacting the acts of law and power that adorn them and give them shape. The notion of History or the archive then seems to be an act of consignation: the aim to coordinate a single corpus in a synchronised rehearsed melody in which all the elements articulate themselves in a unity. In this process of consignation, the disharmonious elements are not only expelled from the corpus of the 'written' History but ousted from the very consciousness of the being.

Memory in popular understanding lies on the opposite side of the spectrum from History. While History plays itself out in the arena of the public, memory is one which consigns itself to the realm of the personal. While collective memory and public memory are slowly gaining currency as the popular other that dares to question the archive and threatens to unravel it, memory in its crudest form has always emanated from an extremely personal space. It is interesting to note that act of memory in general is often misread and misunderstood as only remembering, while it is in actual a mixture of both remembering as well as forgetting. Pierre Nora states, 'What we call memory is in fact a gigantic and breathtaking effort to store the material vestiges of what we cannot possibly remember, thereby amassing an unfathomable collection of things we might someday need to recall'². It is a careful selection of decisions which imbues us with our sense of selves as it is our memories that form the first line of defence when our identity is questioned or under the threat of annihilation. However,

¹ Online Etymology Dictionary.

<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=history&searchmode=none>. Web. 01.06. 2013.

² Pierre Nora. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, English language edition. Ed. and foreword Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, 3 vols, New York: Columbia University Press. 1996-98. PDF.

memory in the public arena has always been viewed with suspicion and often accused of being not only dependable but one which is biased and therefore unreliable. When pitted against the documental rigidity that the official historical archive prides itself in, memory which is in a continuous state of flux, is regarded as erratic and therefore deemed unfit for understanding and legitimizing pasts. However, in the last fifty years, with the development of memory studies and an acknowledgment that events like the Holocaust, which are state-sponsored, cannot have an unbiased representation in the normative History and its archive, there is an upsurge of validating memory as a legitimate means of understanding the past and questioning the policies and politics that such pasts have conferred upon the present.

The third term in the title, 'Immemorial' comes from Walter Benjamin's concept of the immemorial and its effect on our understanding of History. 'The "immemorial" refers to what cannot be recovered through the memory, what necessarily escapes its reach—as, for example, in the way that our childhood necessarily extends beyond what we can recall. The past is irretrievable, and it requires a kind of receptiveness from us.'³ The immemorial lies beyond the realms of both history and memory and only expresses itself to the consciousness in moments of danger of annihilation. It is one whose very act of being forgotten has been forgotten. It resides in the unconscious recesses of both the individual and the collective memory and does not articulate itself through the avenues that are provided by memory or the archive. It is limitless, unbound by historical burden, the repository of all those who have been shunned away from the normative and official avenues, awaiting their claims from a future which will be invested with the messianic power to hear their call.

As evinced through the initial definitions of the three terms, History stands as a gatekeeper of memories, allowing only those which are conducive with the idea of the seamless nation-state and banishing all the other in the realm of the forgotten. Ghosh in his fiction tries to articulate these sceptres of the marginal, the lost or the suppressed stories of 'other' pasts, that unfathomable disparate motley of memories whose very act of forgetting has been forgotten. This can be viewed through the myriad pasts that he delves into in his fictional work.

In *The Circle of Reason* (1986), Alu, an orphan boy goes to live with his phrenology-obsessed uncle, Balaram and his wife Toru in the border town of Lalpukur, which over the

³ Atsuko Tsuji. 'Walter Benjamin's Conception of Experience: A Way of Thinking about Otherness in Educational Context'. *Educational Studies in Japan: International Yearbook* No. 8, 2014. pp. 107–116. PDF.

years has served as a makeshift refugee conglomeration ground for all those trying to outrun persecution in the neighbouring country of Bangladesh. While Balaram tries to construct a new world order through what he believes to be the tenets of Rationality, Ghosh shows the impossibility of such an utopic world through destruction of Balaram's family and the persecution of Alu who even though is conferred stateless through his association with Balaram's eccentric plans (the figure of the terrorist is supposed to be extra-terrestrial to the nation-state), yet he is chased by the state's powers, personified by inspector Jyoti Das, across numerous spaces and continents. The narrative also delves into the lives of migrant workers who lay on the other side of the spectrum of global travellers as they travel not because of interest or furthering their prospects in white collar jobs to the First World countries, but are caught up in a perennial state of statelessness that deems them outsiders in whichever place they remain. Ghosh in this explores how the state derives its own legitimation through the act of illegitimizing these figures of the other, delving into 'those modes of national belonging designated by the "nation" [which] are thoroughly stipulative and criterial: one is not simply dropped from the nation; rather, one is found to be wanting... The subsequent status that confers statelessness on any number of people becomes the means by which they are at once discursively constituted within a field of power and juridically deprived'⁴.

The Shadow Lines (1988), Ghosh's most popular novel, traces the family of the unnamed narrator through three simultaneous generations, that of his grandmother and her sister, his uncle Tridib and his journeys in London and Calcutta, and the narrator's own generation which comprises of him and his cousin Ila. Through the mingling of the three generations expressed through a narrative which constantly shifts positions, both in terms of space and time, Ghosh's narrator tries to understand and explore the ramifications of the partition on not only the generation which experienced it, but rather on the generations that came after, carrying within them the burden of a history which refuses to let go. Delving into questions of borders which are invisible except for in the airport lounges which demarcate the difference between the nation and its neighbour, the novel asks the difficult question of what constitutes the ideas of inclusion and exclusion in nations which are but mirror images of each other? How the cultural and social 'place' when it transforms into the political 'space'

⁴ Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging*. Kolkata: Seagull, 2010 pp31-2. Print.

becomes a moment of crisis within the subcontinent and what that entails to the politics of identity that remain indelibly linked with these concepts.

His next novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), moves into completely uncharted territories as it follows the syphilis affected protagonist Murugan on his delirious search for the elusive Calcutta Chromosome which is transferred not through sexual union but through transference of consciousness thus making the person immortal. Articulated through the language of a thriller as well as conspiracy theories which aim at debunking the official narrative of the discovery of the malarial parasite by Sir Ronald Ross which has remained as one of the enduring stories of the triumph of the Empire in the heartland of the treacherous colony, the novel uses flashbacks, blackouts and other such cinematic techniques to represent a side of history that is collected from personal diaries, journals and remembrances. A motley group of subalterns headed by the dynamic Mangala form the other side of history that reveals in silence and articulates knowledge through the tenets of the unknowable. Overturning the usual concepts of scientific knowledge and temper, Ghosh in this novel, brings together a technologically advanced future, through the character of Antar and a colonial past which obliterates the voice of the colonized, to create a synthesis which will give rise to alternate structures of knowledge. Returning the power of representation to those who have been disallowed from it, this novel is an exercise into dismantling power structures through ways which remain outside the purview of the colonial enterprise.

Returning to his fascination with family genealogies and how they remain as the last bastion of memories which have been spared the onslaught of the homogenizing rhetoric of the nation-state, *The Glass Palace* (2000) takes Ghosh back to his own family histories, examined through the character of the author-narrator, in the tradition of Marquez. Unlike the Buendia family, Ghosh's characters are not microscopic representations of the greater events of the country, but rather *antistories* which are actively fighting the known and accepted modes of history to establish their position in the public memory. Taking up the forgotten Long March of Indians from Burma to India in the eve of the Second World War, Ghosh's narrator brings together characters who are both subservient to the colonial system while actively questioning its legitimacy and efficacy in determining their futures. There are different versions of familial structures that the novel invests itself in—the normative family of brothers and sisters (Manju and Arjun, the rest of the *Lankasuka* family); the royal family which has the added task of exhibiting its familial structures for its subjects and the world (Queen Supalyat and King Thebaw and their children) , the family formed through

friendships and similar modes of thought (Dolly and Uma), the family formed through a nihilistic desire for glory (Arjun and the battalion)—and through them look into the ideas of allegiance, identity and belonging.

Ghosh's fifth novel, *The Hungry Tide* (2005) unlike his other works, invests itself in one location and through it examine the politics that springs up in between the two ideas of human rights and animal rights. Set in the swamps and islands of the Tide Country, *The Hungry Tide* is an ode to the many moods of a nature which is beautiful yet unrelenting and cruel. Introduced to the readers through the eyes of two outsiders, Piya, the cetologist and Kanai, the translator, Sunderbans and its islanders become examples of the symbiotic lifestyles that remain as the only way of survival in such areas and how political interference often leads to a break in this symbiosis leading to destruction and death. Playing upon languages and the silences that pepper them, each of the characters in the novel are stuck in the debate of what is sustainable living and how can that also include a place for all those who have been uprooted from their spaces and forgotten about by a careless state and an even more complacent public memory which is caught up in a frenzy of development and growth.

Ghosh's last three fictional works, *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2015) form parts of a trilogy, named as Ibis Trilogy after the blackbird that forms the ground for all the three novels to anchor themselves into. Following myriad stories of individuals, all of which converge into the opium trade with China, Ghosh narrates an epic which brings out the inherent problematic of the Empire and its exploitation of all those which remained as opposing to its functioning. Ghosh begins with the stories of migrant labourers, presented through the eyes of Deeti, a character who plays an equal role as the narrator in archiving experiences through her artistic renditions in her small shrine, who are herded across the Black Water to the plantations in Malaysia or in China to work in the most unfavourable of conditions with no pay. Commenting upon the new form of slavery which formed the majority of the workforce of the Empire, Ghosh harks to his first novel *The Circle of Reason* and shows how the migrant problem represented in that novel has its inception at a much earlier phase, during the heyday of the British Enterprise. The second narrative that finds a place in this saga is that of the zamindars and other native rulers who lost their lands due to their own gullibility and were often sentenced to imprisonment under false pretext like that of Neel who is incarcerated for forgery. The third strand is that of the businessmen who represent the other side of the colonial process, moving away from the binary of the powerful colonizer and the disenfranchised colonized. The Trilogy delves into the lives of businessmen

like Bahram who actively participated in the colonial process and profited from its endeavours. Chronicling the effects of the Opium trade on the three countries of India, China and England, and the ensuing war that led to the destruction of China and the complete takeover by the Company in all matters of the governance of the Empire, Ghosh tries to show the first flurries of globalisation and easy motility between nations and its final destruction by the British enterprise. The Trilogy also muses about other forms of cultural and social exchanges which remain outside the purview of the exploitative commercial exchange of trade, represented through the forms of art, flora and fauna. Through characters like Paulette and Fitcher in search of the elusive golden camelia or an artist like Robin Chinnery who wishes to learn indigenous art forms which have been considered inferior by the ruling Empire, the Trilogy actively seek out alternate forms of exchanges which stand in stark contrast to the unethical and orally questionable but profitable Opium Trade. The Trilogy also becomes a testament of all those versions of histories which have been lost in the onslaught of colonial historical narratives which have more often than not discredited these pasts as uncivilized, problematic and not worth the archiving process. This is poignantly presented at the end of the second novel, where all that is left of the vibrant world of Canton and the Thirteen Hongs are personal remembrances and the scroll painting by Chinnery sold off at street corners devalued of its actual importance.

This thesis aims to read Ghosh's works through the lens of not only the three concepts as enlisted in the title but also ideas which would put them under scrutiny and try to answer the question as to how much has he been successful as a chronicler of forgotten pasts into bringing them into the purview of the historical and if such an act falls into the same traps that History has been held guilty of indulging in. Exploring how place and space politics play a role in determining one's understanding of history as well as creating sense of identity and belonging, the chapters in this thesis will take up each of these novels and study them through the tenets of place, language used, representation of the other and finally the role of the author-historian and try to prove through myriad examples taken from the novels how Ghosh as a narrator indulges in those same parameters of selectively choosing and representing pasts which fit into the greater narrative of the philosophy of colonial binaries which he ironically ends up championing.

The first chapter, History, Memory and Forgetting, takes up the task of reviewing the different ways in which history has been articulated in the subcontinent and present the inherent crisis that has sprung up in each of them. Reading the supposedly antithetical

colonial narratives and the nationalist narratives, the chapter will go on to show how these two have more in common than they are credited for, in their re-inventing of pasts which will synchronise themselves into not a cacophony of disparate voices but rather a melodious harmony which has its antecedents in the Hegelian view of history. The chapter will then through the works of Jean Louis Chrétien and Walter Benjamin look for other means of representing the pasts which have been forgotten or pushed into oblivion. Delving into ways of bringing the limitless Immemorial into the purview of the memorial and the archive, it will then go on to ground the concept of '*Antistory*', the theoretical framework which will form the foundation of the analysis in this thesis and how it operates through the fiction of Amitav Ghosh. It also brings in the discussion whether justice is a possibility in this act of retrieving pasts and through that justice if the future can finally pay off the debts that these disenfranchised pasts had put a claim on it.

The second chapter, *Mythicizing the Personal*, takes up the two novels, *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines* and aims to deconstruct their narratives in terms of migrant narratives. Migration, which has been one of the most important political and social phenomena of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, has played an intrinsic part in shaping the postcolonial identity. Ghosh in both these novels has extensively referred to the migrant experience and through it aimed at reading different forms of governance that can be utilised or has been put into action which lay in contrast to the federal systems that remain operational in most postcolonial nations. The chapter also tries to engage with identity politics through the avenues of place, language and state of belonging and through it raise questions of how to map the individual experience of the migrant against the larger cultural map of the place he inhabits? How does the state operate in reaffirming its power through marking certain sections of the people inhabiting it as 'illegitimate', an illegitimacy which is interesting as it does not free the individual from the clutches of the state power but binds him more by taking away his basic right to exercise freedom—freedom of place, freedom of speech, freedom of existence. The chapter also delves into how minor literatures, literatures that give voices to the silenced part of histories, can find a place away from the monopoly of the major literature. Through such an exploration, it will then try and summarise if the *antistory* that Ghosh aims to bring to the limelight can possibly open up new avenues of documentation of the minor experience.

Moving on from the nuances of reading migrant narratives, chapter three, *Countering History, Breaking through Memory*, is an interesting amalgamation of ideas which find

expression in the three novels, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide*. Beginning with the play of languages that happen in all three novels, the analysis moves into reading the narratives in terms of counter histories and the pitfalls that remain as points of concern in unearthing and articulating such counter histories. Comparing the edified structures of the Historical archive and the fluid contours of personal memory represented through documents like diaries, journals, notebooks, photographs, and through people and their memories, this chapter tries to answer the question whether it is ever possible to unearth and bring to light ancient pasts without the manipulation of memory and personal prejudices which often colour our remembrances—can the network of remembered memories be broken to allow all those which have slipped through the cracks of History, buried under the weight of time.

Chapter four, *Historicizing the Unhistorical*, engages in a critical analysis of the three parts of the Ibis Trilogy, namely, *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*, an analysis which looks into the various facets of how historical data and documents can be utilised to unearth the unhistorical from the realms of the forgotten. Delving into the minute details of the world that Ghosh paints in the novels, the thronging world of the pre-colonial era and its movement to the formation of the Empire, the chapter looks into the ethical and moral responsibilities that the historian-narrator takes up on himself to present the version of history of the oppressed and the voiceless. The chapter also tries to understand the efficacy of the other ways of globalisation that lies beyond the commercial trade practices, such as flora and fauna, arts and familial relationships which form the core of the three novels. Reading through historical data regarding the events represented in the novels, the chapter also tries to draw a comparison between the historical archive and the world of the fiction and see the differences that remains in representation and what such differences state about the politics of the author-narrator figure.

Chapter five, *Unravelling the Traces*, concerns itself with the problems in Ghosh's representation of the *antistories* and how they affect the overall politics of representation that plays a vital role in deconstructing the static historical archive. Dividing the chapter under the subtopics of the role of the illegitimate child in Ghosh's literary universe, female friendships, the place of the subaltern and language that is utilised to recover the 'trace', the chapter goes on to list specific instances from the eight novels which remain as problematic in the uncovering of the traces that remain as spectres that haunt the official narrative. The chapter closes with a meditation on the role of the author in constructing the platforms for the

unhistorical Immemorial to present itself for documentation and how that documentation needs to be aware of the representational politics that dominate one's understanding of the self and the other in the subcontinent.

The concluding chapter of the thesis summarises the findings of each of the five chapters and through it ponder over the role of the writer in times of turmoil as well as peace. The figure of the historian-writer is imbued with the messianic power to observe and document the immemorial antistory as it flashes by, in a moment of crisis, a moment of its own annihilation. This chapter would try and comprehend whether Ghosh, donning on the cap of that messianic figure have been successful in averting the problems of representation which result in the skewed version of official historical narrative and present the voiceless, the silenced with a platform which is unbiased, not selective and ushers in the subaltern with the power to represent his own self. In examining Ghosh's role, the chapter would also comment on the larger social and ethical dilemma faced in the political scenario of the country and the writer's role in such situations of conflict.

Chapter 1

History, Memory and Forgetting

You 're here to bear a message from the dead

Whose history's dishonoured with their name.

...Be with me when they cauterise the facts.

Be with me to the bottom of the page,

Insisting on what history exacts.

Be memory, be conscience, will and rage⁵

Postcolonialism has always had a strenuous relation to the concept of History as both these points of knowledge production have worked in negation of one another. When one says negation, it isn't in the form that each represents the 'other' of the self but rather as each have had a position of exclusivity where they have produced alternate or contesting modes of knowledge. Postcolonial texts have always grappled with the silences of the History created by the colonial self as well as the identity conferred upon the 'other' by this homogenizing self. In this regard it is imperative to look at Edward Said's statement about the creation of the Orient:

Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence

⁵ Sean O'Brien. 'Cousin Coat'. *Collected Poems*. London: Pan MacMillan, 2012. Web. 15.07.2016.

in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other.⁶

He further goes on to elucidate this idea of the Orient as he states,

Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient; nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious ‘Western’ imperialist plot to hold down the ‘Oriental’ world. It is rather a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philosophical texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a series of ‘interests’, which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philosophical reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly different (or alternate or novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what ‘we’ do and what ‘they’ cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do).⁷

The reason one goes back to Said’s interpretation of the idea of the Orient is not only because it has acted as a stepping stone for generations of postcolonial writers to debunk the myth of the Orient, but also as it has become foundational in delving into the question of how does one then understand History in relation to this ideological construct. In this chapter, we will first delve into what makes History, as we scrutinize the various strands of memory, individual and collective, and try to decipher how these relate and bond with one another, both individualizing as well as de-humanizing the memorialisation project. Secondly, taking the postcolonial condition as the basis, this chapter will look into the various versions and

⁶ Edward Said. ‘From *Orientalism*’, *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Padmini Mongia, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, (1996). p 23. Print.

⁷ *Ibid.* p28.

visions of the historical projects that have gone into the formation of the postcolonial self and through such an in depth analysis, decipher the shortcomings and the loopholes of such historicizing projects and their effect on the notion of the new postcolonial nation, identity and subjectivity. Finally, the chapter will try and establish an alternate critical framework, one that will base itself in the messianic concept of history as evinced in the works of Walter Benjamin and also extend itself to mould itself for the new challenges of configuring and comprehending the postcolonial ethos as presented in Amitav Ghosh's fiction.

Individual Memory, Collective Memory and the legacy of Hegelian History

To decipher and probe into the defining features of the new form of anti-history that the postcolonial setup is committed to writing, one first needs to understand the contours of the pervasive History and its narrative that such a structure is deconstructing. By 'History' this thesis is referring to the Western mode of archiving and narrativising that archival project. History as stated by Hegel, 'combines in our language the objective as well as the subjective side. It means both *res gestae* (the things that happened) and *historia rerum gestarum* (the narration of the things that happened)'⁸. The word 'History' when traced back to its etymological origin, is described as 'an account of one's inquiries', thus pre-empting the biased nature of this enterprise which ironically professes to be just and neutral. Taking a step from this definition of the historical project, one can presume that the being of History lies previous to the act of writing that history. This connection is interesting as one can further presume that the being of History is nothing but the collective remembrance or memory of a past that has been collectively experienced as well as retained in memory for future reference for inscribing it. If one views History as the conglomeration of collective memory, the social memory becoming the precursor of the edification of collective cultural memory into the forms of History, then the question that now becomes pertinent is then how do we categorise individual memory within the realms of the collective? What is the position of the individualized and personal conscious memory in the realm of the community-oriented memory?

Maurice Halbwachs had famously claimed that individual memory depends on and is structured through the social frameworks within which the individual and his activities are

⁸ G.G Hegel. *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. Trans. J. Sibree. London: Bell, 1914. PDF.

inscribed. The individual's memory of events as well as the past is indelibly linked with his place within the social context that he is able to recollect. Thus, individual memory becomes a product built out of references to and interactions with social objects, institutions and events. An extension of such an argument would be that individuality per se, springs from the collective and therefore even the notion of self-consciousness is never entirely personal or detached from the collective. It is this collective that creates the reference of the past and therefore becomes the light bearer of history which goes on to constitute the social notions of History, state, law and justice.

To comprehend this concept of the collective, it is imperative to examine a little more into the idea of the individual figure in the scheme of history making. For this, one goes back to Hegel and his idea of the constitutive Spirit of history. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel conceives the notion of Spirit as essentially historical and memorial; he conceives History as the work of the negative, Spirit that negates the idiosyncratic particularities in order to elevate them into the Universal concept which Hegel grasps as fundamentally 'ethical' in its meaning. To formulate itself into 'ethical memory', and become the point of germination for the spirit as well as history to draw succour from, memory essentially needs to reconstruct itself through a loss—a loss of its individual, psychological and merely conscious based nature and give in to the realms of the collective. This ethical memory transforms the 'figures of consciousness' into 'figures of the world', changing individual consciousness into 'historical consciousness' that now operates within the contours of an ethical world. Angelica Nuzzo explains this further in her work, *Memory, History and Justice in Hegel*,

Memory is a power of transformation; it transforms natural death into ethical death; it turns an event which merely happens within the chains of causes and effects into something brought forth by consciousness, hence into a historical event. Memory is 'ethical' insofar as the dead is no longer a natural and contingent existence but the individualized figure in which the community becomes conscious of its own historical conflicts. Ethical is the memory that gives historical reality and significance—and hence historical fulfilment—to the contingency of individual existence by reinscribing it into the broader collective context in which such existence becomes ethical life. Thus, in the figure created by memory the 'unrest' (*Unruhe*) of contingent

life is brought to the quiet rest (*Ruhe*) of a simple universality—the universality of death and the universality of the ethical or religious community.⁹

It is this ethical memory that reaffirms the individual consciousness through its reintegration into the collective through a series of ‘figures’ that have been lying dormant. The historical consciousness is gained through the act of fixing the fluidity and flux of change within the contours of an immutable figure which is the spirit. The spirit carries within itself the figures of the past which have been lying dormant as concepts within its form. These figures are the remodelled forms of the event, which have been divested of its immediacy and urgency of the moment and instead been fixed into the eternal spot of its own abstraction; a devised concept that carries within itself everything but the real essence of the event. The spirit engages in an act of historical narration as it recalls these latent figures and reconstructs them into ‘events’ in an act of retrospective articulation and speculation. It is here that one realizes that in order to create these complimentary and synchronic concepts of the past, what is required of this ethical memory is a partial recording or reading of the initial event. The event can be construed into its historical form only through its destruction; memory must annihilate the event in its immediate form and from the fragments of such an act recreate and envision the historical spirit, one that is incumbent in the scheme of the collective spirit. Hegel recounts how historical memory preserves in itself, not the event in its sensuous immediacy and idiosyncratic particularity, but the event that is sublated into the universal and the collective by the act of negating its sensuous immediacy and the accidental and contingent mode of its immediate being. Thus, although real, each figure of the spirit is not the entire reality of it, it is rather the expression of a concluded episode. Hence, as a chief source of spirit’s consciousness, ethical memory is always partial and selective and necessarily so; it is always external and removed from the immediacy of the remembered event, always elusive, hinting at a life beyond its actual content. Thus, the History created and realized by the spirit’s unleashing of these figures into moments or events are always based on memory’s betrayal of the truth of the actual event. The memorialized figure might be universal and social but as a figure of the whole it is nonetheless partial, un-true and selective. Nuzzo furthers this idea as she states how the spirit’s ethical memory strives towards the creation of a seamless whole where the spirit can retrospectively rejoice in the causality of the parade of these figures towards one grand finale of historical consciousness:

⁹ Angelica Nuzzo. *Memory, History and Justice in Hegel*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. p30. Print.

Memory is a power that does not allow the single moments (which have acquired separate subsistence in the past) to claim individual, isolated meaning in themselves as was still the case in the preceding linear progression, still centred on successive historical worlds. The moments have no meaning in themselves; but they also have no real meaning when simply arrayed in a sequence or linear succession; to become meaningful, they must be reconnected and re-enacted as figural parts of a collective, universal context—this is *spirit in its accomplished totality*. Embracing retrospectively the entire progression of past figures, memory considers them now synchronically, holding them synoptically together, and disposing them according to their ‘correspondences’ and ‘differences’ across different systematic moments, thereby indicating how all the past figures respectively articulate the interconnected structure of the same spiritual whole—*the totality of the historical epoch*.¹⁰ (My emphasis)

This systematic synchronic re-enactment of the figures are then utilised to reconcile diachronic individual consciousness with the collective consciousness into a moment of absolute unity, reconnecting the different parts in a final comprehensive and cohesive act of memory and unity. This is the conciliation achieved by ‘absolute knowing’ in which the series of the figures of the past come to a triumphant end in fulfilled self-presence. Absolute knowing is nothing but the final recollection of what has happened—the recollection of one that has already taken place in itself and can only be brought forth in its proper and concluded form.

Hegel’s idea of Absolute knowing does not merely work as a synthesizer of disparate moments and figures of the past but contains within itself the element of justice that it owes to the future to which the past lays claim on. It is that carrier of absolute justice that looks beyond the momentary fissures in historical consciousness and instead focuses on the final answer of the historical epoch towards the future whose very understanding lies in its acceptance of the past and concluding its ties with it. Its memory is now ‘our’ collective memory. Absolute knowing is the point where lies history in its finitude, standing at the final position of the achieved concept for which the whole is the result of the preceding process of figuration.

¹⁰ Angelica Nuzzo. *Memory, History and Justice in Hegel*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. p41. Print.

The reason one has been going into the minute details of Hegel's conception of history as well as the spirit of Absolute knowing is that it is that same concept that goes on to becoming the building block for colonial archivist history, one that is designated as 'History' in this study.

History(s) in the postcolonial context

If the various histories that came into forefront post colonial rule in India are compared and studied, there would be two broad perspectives that would be noticed, as Partha Chatterjee points out in his work *Nation and its Fragments*: firstly, colonialist history which is based on the idea of difference and deference (the difference of race requires the colonizer to take over the 'native' state to bring them to the forms of civilized governance and the deferred goal of 'almost but not there'—the native as never quite good enough, clever enough, apt enough to be the colonizer, thus, not allowing the colonizer to give up the reigns of governance to the now 'bettered' native) and secondly, nationalist history that once again looks towards a creation of the mythic past of the nation so as to construct a platform for the new nationalist agenda to be grounded. However, there lies a third form of revisionist history that came into being along these two, a totalizing concept of world history within which Indian history becomes but just one of the figures of the past working towards the cathartic effect of Hegel's spirit's movement towards its dénouement. This thesis would take each of these different forms of history and see how each become but a shadow of the same principles that guide Hegel's spirit of History.

The relic of Colonial narratives

If one divulges into nineteenth century colonial narratives of India, one of the fundamental ideas that seem to be propagated in them is the concept of difference through fixity. To further elucidate this point, one takes recourse to Homi Bhabha's concept of the stereotype within the colonial discourse:

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between

what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated...For it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency: ensures its repeatability in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalization; produces the effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the stereotype, must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed.¹¹

For colonial narratives, the other is always already one that was completely known and yet possessed within itself the quality of the untameable and therefore one that requires the civilizing mission. The discourse of the colonial subject as well the rationale guiding the colonial power is articulated through forms of difference, both racial as well as sexual. Through the creation of both the racial and the sexual other, a hierarchization is maintained that conclusively always leads to the one uniform answer of colonial rule. The colonial discourse produces the colonized other as a social reality which as Bhabha states is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible. 'It resembles a form of narrative whereby the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognizable totality'¹². It is from this point of both the knowable and the unknown that colonial history spring forth into a moment of immutable truth, returning to the narcissism of the Imaginary where it identifies the white ego as the ideal and the whole. Thus, the rest of colonial account becomes a narrative of lack always heralding back to that moment of the unattainable colonial whole. However, it has to be understood that the act of stereotype isn't a unilateral act of domination and oppression; setting up of a false image which becomes the victim of discriminatory practices. Instead it is an ambivalent text of projection and introjection, the splitting of the object into both the fantasy and the phantasmagorical. The split object thus becomes both the desirable as well as the detestable; it contains within itself the articulation of the multiple beliefs and the dramatization of separation that forms the core of colonial History.

However, these various multitudinous interpretations of the colonized all come together in a moment of unity, in the justification of the colonial regime. As Bhabha postulates:

Racist stereotypical discourse, in its colonial moment, inscribes a form of governmentality that is informed by a productive splitting in its construction of

¹¹ Homi K. Bhabha. 'The Other Question'. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994 p 94. Print.

¹² Ibid. p101

knowledge and exercise of power. Some of its practices recognize the difference of race, culture and history as elaborated by stereotypical knowledges, race theories, administrative colonial experience, and on that basis institutionalize a range of political and cultural ideologies that are prejudicial, discriminatory...By 'knowing' the native population in these terms, discriminatory and authoritarian forms of political control are considered appropriate. The colonized population is then deemed to be both the cause and the effect of the system, imprisoned in the circle of interpretation.¹³

It is within this circle of interpretation that colonial accounts of History deem itself to be repeated into a dramatization of identity and a past that not only becomes homogenous and known but also one that closes itself to interpretations of the future. This is further understood by the amount of documentation of the colonial regime that was seen as testimonies to their good governance. The documentation also becomes evidence in the process of the archival history wherein the written obscures and obliterates the language-less 'other', reminding one of the figures of the universal of History that leaves behind the figures of the actual past. Therefore, colonial history becomes an extension of the totalizing spirit of History that silences and eliminates voices of dissent through surveillance and strategies of objectification, normalization and discipline. This administrative rationality finds its inception in the Eurocentric Enlightenment, wherein, knowledge structures are divided into the Western known and the Eastern unknown (and therefore need to be mastered). The discourse of modernity which brought in a new wave of definitions of the individual's relation to the social structure as well as redefining the elements of truth became the impetus that fuelled the colonialist project as well as its narrative. The triumph of Reason over all other avenues of thought was in reality an imperious and imperial will to Power. The grand metanarrative that Western modernity has sought to reconfigure and one which Habermas would conclude to be an unfinished project that continues into the post-modernist ethos, becomes the driving force that channels and fuels not only the colonial mission but also the literature as well as the 'Free trade' philosophy that finds place in the vaulting bookcases of the White supreme in their objectifying and deciphering of the Other. Codifying and institutionalizing the various perceptions of human nature and society under the umbrella terms of 'civilized' and 'savage', colonialist narratives appropriated the humanistic basis of the Enlightenment within the narrow and yet privileging motive of 'obligation' to civilize. It

¹³ Ibid. p118-9

is noteworthy to see how Charles Darwin's concept of the 'survival of the fittest' finds a warped exploration in the colonial understanding of the Other wherein, 'It became a very powerful belief that indigenous peoples were inherently weak and therefore...would die out'¹⁴. The White man's burden was therefore not simply a restoration of civilizational cosmos into the chaos of the unspeakable Other, it was also an anthropological operation to sanitize that which remains beyond the scope of the knowable, one which dissents and stands as the last guard to the abyss that is the colony.

This call of the Being, the authentic self of the West to answer to what the historical situation requires it to do, despite the unsavoury nature of that act, the perennial 'White Man's Burden' becomes the point of inspection and critical scrutiny in Ghosh's work. In the chapter on the alternate historiography in Ghosh's *Ibis* Trilogy, we would observe how such knowledge structures become the foundational archetype for the violent imperialistic mission throughout Asia wherein the Other is destroyed in the name of reason, rationality and 'will' of the people.

The alternative Nationalist historical narrative

Nationalist history lies in the other end of the spectrum of documentation of the colonial past. Working from a point of negation of colonial history, it first discredits the colonialist history's claim of the ideal self of the white. In the second half of the nineteenth century, there developed an agenda for nationalist representation. There was sudden realisation of a need for self-representation, to claim a history for the nation which has not been distortingly written by alien rulers and colonizers. Chatterjee writes, '...the call sent out by Bankimchandra—"We have no history! We must have a history"—implied in effect an exhortation to launch the struggle for power, because in this mode of recalling the past, the power to represent oneself is nothing other than political power itself'¹⁵. Even though Bankimchandra as well as Chatterjee are exclusively here speaking of a history of Bengal, however, it is imperative to remind oneself that Bengal did serve as the crux of the colonial narrative and therefore a history of Bengal can be presumably inflated to being the idea of the history of the nation. What Bankim meant by the statement was not merely the absence of

¹⁴ Linda Tuhiwai Smith. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books Ltd. 1999 p 62. Web. 15.07.2016

¹⁵ Partha Chatterjee. 'Nation and Its Pasts'. *Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993 p76. Print.

any chronicling of the past of Bengal, because that would be a falsity as a number of histories of Bengal did exist at that time, but rather a history written by Bengalis which would be a representation of the newly awakened sense of the nation and national consciousness. While the Bengali nationalists, schooled in European historiography and modes of knowledge production, channelled their energies in bringing forth a history of the nation, what became intriguing and yet problematic in this rewriting of the historical narrative was the point of inception from whence this nationalist narrative was sourcing itself. Invariably, these accounts were looking at Puranic history as the mythical legitimized past within which the Muslim was seen as the 'other', the aggressor as well as the fabricator of indigenous history. This nationalist history contained within itself the idea of Brahminical domination couched in the rhetoric of European historical studies. As Chatterjee shows through his extensive study of the different historical narratives that became important during these times, there is a chronological dynastical sequencing, based on the concepts of divine power and ideals of dharma, that becomes the guiding force in the comprehension of this 'linear' past. What becomes more problematic is that the Hindu past is seen as untainted and glorious which is then brought to its decline through the tyranny and savagery of Muslim rule. Chatterjee further accentuates this idea through the following passage:

For the Indian nationalists in the late nineteenth century, the pattern of classical glory, medieval decline, and modern renaissance appeared as one that was not only proclaimed by the modern historiography of Europe but also approved for India by at least some sections of European scholarship. What was needed was to claim for the Indian nation the historical agency for completing the project of modernity. To make that claim, ancient India had to become the classical source of Indian modernity, while the 'Muslim period' would become the night of medieval darkness. Contributing to that description would be all the prejudices of the European Enlightenment about Islam. Dominating the chapters from the twelfth century onward in the new nationalist history of India would be a stereotypical figure of 'the Muslim', endowed with a 'national character': fanatical, bigoted, warlike, dissolute, and cruel.¹⁶

The nationalist history followed the linear succession of a beginning where the history of the nation is glorious in all spheres of wealth, power, learning and religion, where it has reached the pinnacle of civilization, which is then followed by an age of decline characterised by the

¹⁶ Partha Chatterjee. 'Histories and Nations'. *Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993 p 102. Print.

ascendance of Muslim rule which according to such history leads to a subjection of the nation. This is followed by the final part where there is a hope for redemptive measures that will reaffirm that glorious past and bring back that unified identity of the nation through this new found national consciousness. What remains interesting in this linear causal line of narrativising is that the glorification of the Hindu past is sanctified only through European acknowledgement of its prominence. The evidence from Orientalist scholarship was the fundamental basis on which the nationalist historiography was claiming its grounds. Secondly it is important to note that the idea of Indian nationalism is being stated as a Hindu nationalism where the notion of 'Hindu-ness' is not a religious but rather a territorial and political identity. The criterion for inclusion is historical origin, that is, only those whose ancestry can be shown or is seen as originating within the territorial contours of the nation are the true inheritors of its history and its past. The rest, like Muslims and Christians, who originate beyond those boundaries are deemed as the 'foreigners' and the minorities. They will therefore remain the disenfranchised in the national past and must submit to the rule and the protection of the majority.

As one can visualize, the birth of this extremist politics through the idea of the sovereignty of the nation brings back the notion of the totalizing spirit of history that seeks to mute dissenting and disrupting voices, working towards a seamless glorious future to which the past remains a realized goal and one which is enacted every day in the determining of the nature of this future. Through this one can presume, that colonialist history and nationalist history, even though different in their approach as well as their intentions, are still working in tandem to converge to that universal homogenous History from which they both are drawing their source. It becomes discernible that both universal world history and the homogenous narrative of the history of the nation presupposes the concept of 'totality'. As Chatterjee rightly points out that the main hindrance to the postcolonial is this concept of the totalizing nationalism, one that deters us from venturing into other avenues of understanding the past: 'Until such time that we accept that it is the very singularity of the idea of a national history of India which divides Indians from one another, we will not create the conditions for writing these alternate histories'¹⁷.

Revisionist History and the problem of Universalism

¹⁷ Partha Chatterjee. 'Histories and Nations'. *Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993 p 115. Print.

The third form of narrative history that finds its position alongside nationalist and colonialist histories is what Chatterjee refers to as revisionist history. As stated earlier, one of the first points of this notion of history is the discrediting of the break in historical narrative that is put forward by both colonialist and nationalist histories, albeit for different reasons. Revisionist historians argue that the colonial regimes were not different from the indigenous regimes of the colonies, but rather a causal continuation from those regimes. Stating that the eighteenth century was a time of economic vigour rather than political confusion and decline, historians like Burton Stein, David Washbrook, Christopher Bayly and others look at the period between 1750 to 1850 as a period of transitions. This perspective relies on the fact that the Indian economy was an open field for transactions and the colonizers were merely one of the players who successfully emerged victorious in the free trade market. While the initial years of the colonial enterprise might work within the contours provided by such a theory, the later period of colonial rule becomes a glaring problem to this scheme of the market economy as the marker of the beginning of British history in India. Moreover, this revisionist theory puts colonialism merely as a footnote in what it recognises as the enduring perspective of Indian history, a brief interlude in the long narrative of the nation. Chatterjee comments,

What is this (revisionist) theory? It is the familiar theme of capitalist development...the new twist on this theme has at its vortex the claim that not all forms of development of capital necessarily leads to modern industrialism. The development of industrial capital in England, or in Western Europe or North America, was the result of a very specific history. It is the perversity of Eurocentric historical theories that has led to the search for similar developments everywhere else in the world; whenever that search has proved fruitless, the society has been declared incapable of producing a true historical dynamic. Instead of tracing the particular course of the indigenous history, therefore, the practice has been to see the history of 'backward' countries as a history of 'lack', a history that always falls short of true history.¹⁸

It is a pertinent point that Chatterjee is raising here: the revisionist historical theory does not merely make colonialism but a logical process in the enduring narrative of the nation, it also makes the colonized history a history that is forever in the process of defining itself through the process of lack. Therefore, one is once again faced with the totalizing quality of this

¹⁸ Partha Chatterjee. 'The Colonial State'. *Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993 p 30. Print.

narrative strategy where the historical theory put forward by Washbrook not only easily removes the violent intrusion of colonialism, it rather makes it the innate and the inviolable part of indigenous history, an indigenous history which can only be constructed through the approval of the colonial self.

If one looks at the three different forms of history that have all prominently placed themselves in front of the postcolonial subject, one realises that while their agendas may differ, yet they all seem to converge within the common grounds of a universalizing History that moves towards a future of common knowledge and in the process necessarily pre-empts the destruction of all notions of the incommensurable and in the process forecloses all that is incommensurable to the homogenous time of a totalizing history. What becomes even more remarkable is how each of these historical accounts works within the perimeter of narrative strategies that further the Historical project towards ideological manoeuvres through which imagined communities gain essentialist identities. These accounts continually seek to displace the anxiety of the plural modern space through turning territory into tradition, the multitudes of people into the homogenous 'One', turning territoriality into a mad rationale of archaic traditionalism. To comprehend this creation of totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—one needs to therefore delve into not merely what these accounts are stating but also in the form and the language as well as the structure that these accounts are utilizing for the realization of this goal. It is here that it becomes necessary to understand Paul Ricoeur's reading of the narrative identity and how History becomes a creation of that narrative self.

The storied self and the problem of the archive

Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* remains one of the most important works when examining the position of the narrative self in terms of history and ethical understanding. For Ricoeur, narrative is 'the privileged means by which we reconfigure our confused, unformed and mute temporal existence'¹⁹. It is this narrative that brings together the disparate points of incidents and turns them into a causal story that creates in itself a meaning beyond the immediate meaning of the events. Ricoeur believed in the Socratic idea that it is only an 'examined' life that is worth living. By 'examined' he refers to the various concordant and discordant strains of life that come together in a mode of narration thus, creating within that act of fusion, a narrative identity. This process of conception of the narrative identity allows

¹⁹ Paul Ricoeur, 'A New Ethos for Europe' in Paul Ricoeur: *The Hermeneutics of Action*. London: Sage Publications, 1996, p. 9. Print.

one to develop a deep sense of being a subject to the cultural and social symbols rather than a unilateral narcissistic ego. Stories of the self provide a temporal space for the individual in which experience can be reflected upon and it is from this that the concept of 'mythos' takes its origin. The aim of 'mythos' is to give a structure and a grammar to the life of action of the individual by transcribing it into a story. Myth, the most common form of early narrative, was a traditional plot or storyline that could be translated from one generation of tellers to the next. This is true of the great mythological sagas of the Celtic, Greek, Persian and Chinese cultures and others, each of which relied on this act of myth making for the propagation of its cultural and social value modes. However, mythic narrative mutated over time into two main branches: historical and fictional; the former developed an allegiance over time to the reality of past events while the latter delved into the creative re-imaginings of the social milieu around it. Ricoeur searched for a fundamental experience that could integrate these two narrative strands again. He found a solution in the hypothesis that the constitution of a narrative identity, whether individual or collective, is the most appropriate site of fusion of these two strands. He held that the human person finds self-expression and a sense of identity through the reflective space offered by the twofold world of real and fictional stories.

This act of creating the myth is not merely a forming of a narrative, but rather a mimetic transformation of the disparate and scattered strains of events into a new paradigm. This transformation can be seen as a synthesis of the heterogeneous but it is a synthesis which is much more than a plain mirroring of nature. It is rather a complete re-imagining and creative re-description of the world where 'hidden patterns and hitherto unexplored meanings can unfold'²⁰. The narrative mimetically offers the subject new ways of imagining the world and through this act of re-imagining, the subject reaches a point of catharsis which is the next point of the narrative movement.

Ricoeur over time has argued for the interweaving of the two strands of history and fiction as he firmly believed that both these narrative threads contain within themselves the loci of cathartic power that enables the subject to feel empathy beyond the personal boundaries of family, friends and other such knowable and recognisable points of relation. This power of empathy, which encompasses all that is both known and foreign to us becomes the standing landmark of our ethical sensitivity, one that is important for the realisation of the historical

²⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984-88), vol. 3. Taken from Maria Duffy. Paul Ricoeur's *Pedagogy of Pardon: A Narrative Theory of Memory and Forgetting*. New York: Continuum, 2009 p28. Print.

goal. This process of experiencing both the self and the other through the lens of of narration provokes a modification in our ways of perceiving the world as well as the various socio-cultural milieu and instead opens up our experience to newer forms of knowledge, seeing and comprehension. The narrative equips us with an alternate mode of self-identity which in turn becomes important in our ethical understanding of the narrative as well as moulding ourselves within the moral contours that the narrative opens up. It also creates the possibilities of understanding the self in terms of the other, not as a negation but rather a continuation, as both sameness and difference. Ricoeur explains it as:

A kind of otherness that is not (or not merely) the result of comparison..., otherness of a kind that can be constitutive of selfhood as such. Oneself as Another suggests from the outset that the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other²¹

The self undergoes an interesting transformation in incorporating itself in the double take of the narrative strategy. The story narrated by the self about itself is a narration about the action of the 'who' of the self, as well as garnering an identity for this 'who'. It has to be remembered that the narrative self is different from the self that is the reader of this narrative. The narrative self is always in a dichotomous process of both 'having become' and the 'becoming'. It is the process, and promise (*ipse*) as well as the sameness (*idem*). While the *ipse* answers to the mutative and every changing "who" of the narrative, as in the promise that the narrative self holds for itself towards the future, the *idem* answers to the sameness of the condition of the self which gives itself its basic traits and characters, in short, the 'what' of the narrative thread. In further delving into the *idem* of the self, it becomes obvious then that the self's narration of the disparate strands will always already contain an undercurrent of subjectivity that forms the foundation of the mimetic story telling process. Maria Duffy further elucidates this point by stating:

Consequently we come to the realization that storytelling is never 'neutral'. Every narrative bears some evaluative charge regarding the events narrated and the actors featured in the narration. All narratives carry their own weightings regarding the 'moral worth' of their characters and tend to dramatize or heighten the 'moral

²¹ Paul Ricoeur. 'Introduction: The Question of Selfhood', *Oneself as Another*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 p 3. Print.

relationships' between actions and their consequences, which, in his *Poetics*, Aristotle referred to as the 'emplotted relationship between character, virtue and fortune.' Moreover, as Ricoeur asserts, there is no narrated action that does not involve some response of approval or disapproval relative to the scale of goodness or justice - though it is always up to the 'readers' to choose between the various value options proposed by the narrative. He wagers for example, that the 'very notion of cathartic pity or fear' linked as it is to unmerited tragedy, would collapse if our aesthetic responses were to be 'totally divorced' from any empathy or antipathy towards the character's ethical quality. The strategy of the 'narrator' is to give the reader a vision of the world that is never ethically neutral:

“In this sense narrative already belongs to the ethical field in virtue of its claim inseparable from its narration -to ethical justice. Still more, it belongs to the reader, now an agent, an initiator of action, to choose among the multiple proposals of ethical justice brought forth by the reading”.²²

Thus, narrative identity is not merely close to personal identity, it is rather a play of the two contrasting forces of sedimentation (the properties of the self which remain unchanging as well as those inscribed in the past) and innovation (the future self towards which the past is progressing as a form of becoming). Therefore, the narrative self is caught up forever in a process of re-interpretation based on the different cultural and social platforms that are given to the reader self to choose from. Essentially the storied self reveals a sort of equivocal behaviour wherein it works within the contrasting points of sameness and difference. It is this dialectical play that allows the past to not be closed off into an immutable moment of truth in time but rather be in a constant dynamic point of being answerable to the future. It is interesting to note that Ricoeur states that this idea of the storied self is not only applicable to individuals but even institutions and ages of history.

It is important now that we again go back to the discussion of how History is formulated within the postcolonial setup and the problem that Ricoeur's idea of the storied self brings in to that notion. While discussing the various forms of historical narratives that came in in the wake of the colonial past of the subcontinent, one of the main points that came through was

²² Maria Duffy. *Paul Ricoeur's Pedagogy of Pardon: A Narrative Theory of Memory and Forgetting*. New York: Continuum, 2009 p31. Print.

the immutable character of these voices of the past. The archiving project in the post colonial set up have always and again looked into an immovable past of fixity which has created a storied self that is not only immutable but one which is forever an answering back to the singular notion of the 'other'. The colonial history was fixated on the creation of the other as a negation of the self and therefore the need to fend the self against this idea of the other. The nationalist history became the exact mirror image of the colonial historical narrative in its lateral inversion of the position of the self and the alien foreign 'other'. The narrative storied selves in each of these become a representation of the *idem* while the *ipse* is forever closed off to a future on which the storied self remains unchangeable thus, foregoing the promise that the future can have in the recreation of the past selves. What this has resulted in is a past that remains unfinished and thus haunts the door of the the future in its grotesque and un-mutated form that is stuck in a borrowed imagining of the white other. As Chatterjee succinctly puts it,

If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the post colonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of the colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imagination must remain forever colonized.²³

The storied self of the postcolonial imagining is therefore forever caught up in the syndrome of repeating the misery of the borrowed modern state, one that is the residue of that same narrative that has closed itself to scrutiny and change. The autonomous forms of imagination of the postcolonial community seem to be continually overwhelmed and loomed over by the history of the 'post'colonial state. It is Banquo's Ghost that continues to not only haunt it, but also decide its actions towards a future whose possibilities have been tapered off. 'Here lies the root of our postcolonial misery: not in our inability to think out new forms of the modern community but in our surrender to the old forms of the modern state'²⁴.

²³ Partha Chatterjee. 'Whose Imagined Community'. *Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993 p9. Print.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p11.

This is further proved through Jacques Derrida's discussion of the problem of the archive. While Derrida is referring to the universal problem of the archive, it is especially important to consider this argument viz-a-viz the postcolonial condition. Jacques Derrida in his *Archive Fever: a Freudian Impression*, deliberately goes back to the origin of the word 'archive', *Arkhé* in which the antithetical ideas of commencement and commandment embrace in a moment of absolute unity, and in this manner he demonstrates the archive as a privileged site of topography. He elucidates how the act of historicizing or archiving is not merely retelling the fables of the past but re-enacting the acts of law and power that adorn them and give them shape. The notion of History or the archive then seems to be an act of consignation: the aim to coordinate a single corpus in a synchronised rehearsed melody in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In this process of consignation, the disharmonious elements are not only expelled from the corpus of the 'written' History but ousted from the very consciousness of the being. If one applies this to the postcolonial condition then it becomes absolutely necessary to call out this homogenizing mission that the borrowed colonial concept of the modern state has thrust upon the postcolonial imagining. There is thus, an urgent need to reclaim the *ipse* of the storied self and through that open up the static nature of the historical project to the dynamic opportunities of the 'Antistory'. However, before we go on to enumerate the defining features of this new form of imagining the storied postcolonial self, it is essential to first go back to the idea of the storied self as propounded by Ricoeur and understand the various implications of a change in the narrative vision that one is looking forward to bringing in, in the arena of the postcolonial map of history writing.

The vanished memory, hyper-memory and the question of forgiveness

According to Ricoeur, no forgiveness is possible until memory has been dealt with because it is essential to understanding and acceptance, these being forms of reconciliation and healing in their own right. Conflict arises from the failure to recognise the other. Ricoeur suggests that in all a human being thinks, does and desires, he or she is a child of tradition, and is therefore linked experientially to the past, present and future. Against the metaphorical backdrop of the 'Fall' story, the human person is presented as one who also experiences finiteness, limitedness, weakness, sin and mortality. Thus, remembering becomes a moral duty, a debt owed to the victims of history.

The point of historical remembering therefore is to connect the past and the future in an exchange of memory and expectation and dispel the tension that lies between the past (as the site of experience) and the future (the horizon of expectation). Memory does not merely need to understand the inception of the story of the self but also unearth the simultaneous stories of the other that lay buried within the causality of time and space, pushed into the realm of the banal through explanations of social, historical and other causes. Memory therefore takes up the prophetic task of remembering those which have been forgotten; as Ricoeur is quick to point out, ‘We must preserve the scandalous dimension of the event, leave that which is monstrous, inexhaustible by explanation. Thanks to memory and the narratives that preserve the memory of the horrible, the horrible is prevented from being levelled off by explanation’²⁵. This memory or act of remembering is dimensionally different from the history of victory, progress and selective forgetting that we have been dealing with till now. It is a history that stands counter intuitive to all these tendencies, the one which bears within itself the moral load of entreating for a reinterpretation of its subject positions. It has to be a remembering that becomes a stimulus that questions and changes the history of those who have not merely been silenced but engulfed into absolute forgetting by the contours of this victorious homogenous narrative.

There is yet another aspect of historical consciousness that needs to be understood before one can proceed to the moment that lies beyond the edified codes of such structures. Ricoeur in his reading of creation of the narrative storied self and how that binds itself to the re-creation of the past states that all narration carries within itself not only a subjective vision but also a more universal concept of justice. All stories are moving towards the resolution wherein its voice receives not only the justice of being heard but also the place within the overall system of response of approval or disapproval based on a scale of goodness or justice. Within the homogenizing world of historical consciousness, every storied self that has been included within its victorious march towards fulfilment carries within itself some motif of the overall code of conduct that is again determined by the scale of goodness as perceived by the spirit of history. When one looks at historical consciousness through this lens, it become doubly worrisome and problematic as now the politics of inclusion is no longer based on the idea of what works as a synchronic voice within the totalizing concept of history but rather what can modify itself according to the codes of conduct in order to be included within the vaults of

²⁵ Paul Ricoeur. *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination*. Augsburg: Fortress Press, 1995, p. 290. Web. 10.03.2015

official remembrance. If one considers the question of the archive at this juncture, one realizes that the archive is not simply making a choice on the basis of the privileged but rather on the basis of an overwhelming code of conduct that becomes the common link of reference for the remembered. Moreover, in making a choice it is not discarding the rest of the dissenting voices, but rather pushing them into the realms of the forgotten from where it would be impossible to answer back. We will move onto this question of the radically forgotten in a little while. Before that it is pertinent to bring into discussion the different regimes of memory that now becomes available for deconstructing the edified structure of History and how does one understand their position in the greater realm of identity politics that they carry within them.

At the heart of History is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory. History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it. At the horizon of historical societies, at the limits of the completely historicized world, there would occur a permanent secularization. History's goal and ambition is not to exalt but to annihilate what has in reality taken place. A generalized critical history would no doubt preserve some museums, some medallions and monuments—that is to say, the materials necessary for its work—but it would empty them of what, to us, would make them *lieux de mémoire*. In the end, a society living wholly under the sign of history could not, any more than a traditional society, conceive such sites for anchoring its memory.²⁶

Nora's assessment that modern society lives in the realm of history and therefore it becomes impossible to return to the regime of memory is a very acute point as it dexterously presents the difficulty of extracting the realm of true memory from the hyperactivity of history that surrounds us. Nora states that societies based on memory are no more, just as the traditional modes of transmission of memory have vanished, memory has been uprooted and eradicated by the conquering forces of history. What one today encounters in the name of memory are 'in fact a gigantic and breath taking effort to store the material vestiges of what we cannot possibly remember, thereby amassing an unfathomable collection of things that we might someday need to recall'.²⁷ This condition of too much memory is starkly different from communicative memory that Jan Assmann speaks of in *Cultural Memory and Early*

²⁶ Pierre Nora. 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*'. Trans. Mark Roudebush. *Representations*, Vol. 26 (Spring 1989), p7. Web. 19.06. 2015

²⁷ Ibid. p8

Civilization. Assmann in his significant work differentiated between the forms of memory that stand as loci to civilizations. Analysing in depth the differences between cultural and communicative memory, Assmann goes on to state how communicative memory is one that is time bound, as one which is often transmitted through oral narratives and generational memory. It is cultural memory, articulated through ritualistic and ceremonial commemoration of the past and that past's continuance in the present that creates History for the civilization. It is from this commensurable memory structures that the problem of excess of memory derives its point of origin. However, it is vital to differentiate between this hyper-memory and cultural memory, which in spite of being its emanating point bears little resemblance to the final vision and version of it. It is not living organic memory that is intrinsically intertwined to our sense of selves that communicative memory bears itself out to. Neither are they the cultural memory that lives on through traditions and fixed objectifications, the contained repetitions of memorial modules for remembrance. They are the hyper representations of documentation that lies at the heart of history making. The problem of too much memory in the form of not only private accounts but public accounts reminds one once again of Bhabha's interesting piece on the excess of documentation during the colonial era in India. Bhabha in his essay 'Sly Civility' talks about the excess of documentation that becomes the hallmark of good governance in the colonial regime. However, he is quick to point out that this excess of signification is a movement towards an undermining and subverting the very illusion of civility that the colonial rule wishes to propagate to the masses as well as to its own self:

Between the Western sign and its colonial signification there emerges a map of misreading that embarrasses the righteousness of recordation and its certainty of good government...For it reveals an agonistic uncertainty contained in the incompatibility of empire and nation; it puts on trial the very discourse of civility within which representative government claims its liberty and empire its ethics. Those substitutive objects of colonialist governmentality—be they systems of recordation, or 'intermediate bodies' of political and administrative control—are strategies of surveillance that cannot maintain their civil authority once the colonial supplementarity, or excess of their address is revealed.²⁸

²⁸ Homi K. Bhabha. 'Sly Civility'. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge 1994 p135-6. Print.

Taking cue from Bhabha's argument, one can go on to state that the excess of memory that pervades the social system of memory becomes not an unintentional hoarding of all events but rather a deliberate and calculated compilation of indiscriminate mass of memory that changes the very significance of the archive. It becomes symptomatic of a new consciousness that carries within itself a terroristic effect of historicized memory. The terroristic aspect of such memory lies in not only its overwhelming number that creates a situation of impossibility of inscribing them with value, but also further alienating the vanished memories from ever surfacing through the cracks of the consciousness. In the excess of articulation what gets left out are ones who never had the mode of documentation or storing available to them. Therefore it is necessary to be weary of the outpouring of memory that is endemic within the new postcolonial set up wherein the deconstruction of the edified History results in an answering back that contains within itself this symptom of the over-exposure of the figure of the other. The other in the postcolonial therefore become a long repeated trope of the colonial self which now, in its moment of prominence and promise, needs to break the myth of the self as well as replace that colonial self with its own colonial other. In other words, it displaces the colonial figure with the figure of the colonized, while continuing with the same rhetoric of power and identity, what changes now is the direction from which that power emanates and flows. This sort of deconstruction of History does not lead to emancipation from the chains of privileged History that had been the force of oppression, rather it creates a vicious cycle of signification wherein the very germ of the identity of the postcolonial subject is forever caged within the rhetoric of being 'post' colonial, never truly freeing or rising above the same archival privileged History that it had started out to debunk and deconstruct.

The second problem within the arena of memory is what Ricoeur points out as 'too little memory'. This once again germinates from the inability to articulate that which lies beyond the realm of the rhetoric of History. Moreover, as Ricoeur remarks, remembering is an ethical and political problem because it has to do with the construction of the future - implying that recollection consists, not only in having a deep concern for the past, but in the transmission of the meaning of the past to the next generation. The duty to remember then has mostly to do with the future: as an imperative directed towards the future, it is the exact opposite side of the traumatic character of the humiliations and wounds of history. The 'duty to tell' is pedagogic in the sense of helping to prevent the past from repeating itself in the future.²⁹ It is

²⁹ Maria Duffy. *Paul Ricoeur's Pedagogy of Pardon: A Narrative Theory of Memory and Forgetting*. New York: Continuum, 2009 p93. Print.

this promise to the future that leads to a sudden vanishing of memory as to remember is to also take responsibility of that act of remembrance. This point of responsibility leads to not only being answerable to the claims of the past that has been suppressed for so long, but also to accept the reconfigured questions of accountability, justice and obligation that comes with the ‘duty to tell’. It is at this juncture that the two potentials of the social imaginary—ideological (which is a symbolic confirmation of the past) and utopic (symbolic opening towards the future)—engage themselves within a cohesive tension to determine which becomes the determining character in the formation of the new imagined space. Therefore the refusal of open oneself up to the scrutiny of the oppressed and becoming their witness in the process of the critique of all those structures that have played actively to keep them away from the dialogue. A good example of this would be the refusal of most SS members to bear responsibility to the act of witnessing of the Holocaust. The recent case of Oskar Groening, the ‘book-keeper of Auschwitz’ and the question of responsibility to remember and accept accountability wherein his defence has rested on the fact that he had not ‘actively’ participated in the murders, or for that matter the train conductors in the documentary feature, *Shoah*, who refused to consent to the fact that he knew who the prisoners were and what was going to happen to them, point towards the moral and ethical dimension of remembering and therefore the reluctance to remember. It is interesting to note here that Groening, now ninety-four years old, has been finally convicted by a German Court on the premise of his acceptance of ‘moral guilt’ for his participation in the Nazi pogrom.

In discerning the various strands of problematic associated with reading memory, it now becomes vital to ask two questions which will go on to define the main agenda of this thesis. Firstly, if one is looking beyond the dichotomous relation of self and the other in the formation of colonial and postcolonial ethos, then what is it that one is looking to unearth? Secondly, how does one unearth one that already lies beyond the scope of language as language itself becomes a marker of the colonial past? It is at this juncture in the discussion I would like to bring in the concept of ‘*Antistory*’ that will be foundation of the argument I have been building up to through a detailed analysis of the various strands of history and memory that have been made available for the formation of the postcolonial ethos.

***Antistory*: Origin, Definition and the question of Happiness**

To begin with an understanding of the concept of the *Antistory*, it is important to go to the point of its inception. For that one needs to go back to Walter Benjamin’s conception of the

role that history should play rather than the one that it has accustomed itself to. Equating the ideas of History and happiness, Benjamin states that like the idea of happiness, history also lies in a possibility that lies in another time. Happiness as a concept is always resident in the future; the point of absolute happiness is one that forever moulds and shifts itself into newer avenues of desire whose very availability and realisation consists of deferring it into 'becoming' rather than having 'become'. It becomes the repository of all possibilities and according to Benjamin, it is in its multitudinous possibilities that become its triumph, and he believes that it is this idea of possibilities of becoming that Historical cognition should mould itself in. Historical cognition is cognition of that which has still not become history, one that is filled with the possibility of becoming one but one that has not yet been actualized. Unlike History that waves its flag over the venerated ground of realized potential, this history is one which is only possible because of the possibilities it missed. Benjamin believed that the true historicity of the historical project lies in the un-reality of its existence. Werner Hamacher in his reading of Benjamin tries to understand what redemption means in a history which lies in the realm of the potential missed rather than one gained:

The past carries with it a hidden index by which it is referred to redemption. Doesn't a breath of the air that pervaded earlier days caress us as well? In the voices we hear, isn't there an echo of now silent ones? Don't the women we court have sisters they no longer recognize? If so, then there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Then our coming was expected on earth. Then, like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim.

Redemption, as Benjamin here talks about it, is meant most prosaically: a redeeming (*Einslösung*) of possibilities, which are opened with every life and are missed in every life.³⁰

Each possibility that was missed in the past has the opportunity to be fulfilled in the future. As the possibilities of the past have not been fully realized and actualized, they continue to claim their position within the present and the future through deliberation, intentions and demand their realization from those that address them. There is historical time only in so far as there is an excess of the unactualized, the unfinished, failed, thwarted, which leaps beyond

³⁰ Werner Hamacher. "'Now': Walter Benjamin and Historical Time'. *Walter Benjamin and History*. Ed. Andrew Benjamin. New York: Continuum 2005, p40. PDF.

its particular Now and demands from another Now its settlement, correction and fulfilment. Historical time is therefore time that contains within itself the capability of finding a realization and fulfilment in the actual. The present Now has been given the messianic power to fulfil the claims of the past that has not obtained its potential, that still remains unactualized:

Messianic power is therefore nothing other than the implicit hypothesis of the missed possible that there has to be an instance to correct the miss, to do the undone, to regain the wasted and actualize the has-been possible. This power therefore is not one that is our own, independent of this claim. It is not 'ours', something we can have at our disposal by our own means, but it is the power which we have been 'endowed with' by others, it is the power of the claim itself and of the expectation that the claim is met. This power is never messianic in the sense that we ourselves are enabled by it to direct the hope for our own redemption towards the future or, to be more precise, to future generations, but only in the entirely different sense that we have been 'endowed with' it by former generations, even by all former generations, as the compliance with their expectations. The messianic power is, in short, the postulate of fulfilability and, in this sense, of redeemability that is immanent in each missed opportunity and distinguishes it as a possibility... But it is a weak power also because it has to become extinguished in each future by which it is not perceived and actualized.³¹

It is this messianic power that requires to be seized and realized before the moment of past disappears altogether. There is a need for the reclaiming of the ancient past which lies beyond the terroristic mode of history and memory that we have been discussing about. *Antistory* defines itself as the present which is endowed with the messianic power, however weak, to grasp upon the vanishing ancient memory in the moment of its extinction. In its epistemological origins, the concept of *Antistory* is applied to a new kind of post-modernist fiction that subverts our notional understanding of story-telling. First utilised by Philip Stevick for his anthology of experimental fiction, the term *Antistory* has been utilised to refer to non-normative forms of narratives where the Aristotelian ideas of standard plot structure as well as subject matters have been discarded for avant-garde techniques and novel subject and tones of fiction-writing. I have deliberately chosen this term as the crux of my theoretical framework as it not only carries within itself the tools of subversion of standardized concepts

³¹ Ibid. p41-2

of narration techniques, it also becomes a symbolic representation of the act of representation which lies beyond representation. In other words, it symbolically anticipates the myriad possibilities of 'becoming' by unravelling itself to the processes of historical cognition and it is only through such an endeavour of understanding the missed possibilities of the past that happiness would become a possibility. It is to this possibility of happiness plunged in the crisis of loss, that *Antistory* becomes a custodian to.

Standing at the altar of the Benjamin's idea of the historical which is only ever that is not yet, the ancient past reveals itself to the *Antistory* custodian in a moment of crisis. It is a crisis of absence, they are potentialities that are fleeting, not a substantial stock that lies dormant within the archive waiting to be actualized in time. As fleeting, non-archival, contingent possibilities, they can be grasped only at the moment when one realises that they cannot be grasped and put within the contours of the known language and structure. This is the reason *Antistory* does not refer to a historian or a writer as to put it within these parameters would be again to miss the possibilities of its avenues. It can only avail itself to a custodian who realizes its potential and the urgency of its fulfilment, but also realizes that its essence lies in the act of becoming rather than the codified edification of the 'already become'. Thus, articulating the past does not mean recognizing it in a manner that it 'really was'. It means appropriating a memory as it reveals itself in the moment of danger; a danger that threatens both the content of that history as well as the tradition that rests to inherit it. It is therefore imperative for every age to be weary of the conformism that this historical project will not only be subjected to but also will be in danger of being engulfed by. The second point of *Antistory* lay in its distrust of the continuum of time that underlies the historical projects. The perennial conformism of time becomes the foundation on which History has always rested its laurels, thus becoming a chain of causal presentation of the past where everything relates to the other in the mode of bargain for meaning. History then becomes a linear and homogenous process whose form always remains the same and whose content lay indifferent. To be truly historical, History first needs to disassociate itself from the linearity of time and estrange itself from the causal links that holds it in place. The true historicity cannot be understood as a victorious march on a linear scale of empty time. It is here that we enter the realm of *Antistory* that recognizes itself not in the cause and effect of historical time but one that goes beyond it into the realm of the Other. I would come into this question of the Other soon in detail. Thus, a moment is genuinely historical only if it recognizes itself as intended by a former one, if it recognizes itself as the one intended in the other and only in this intention of

the other. For Benjamin, the self is not historical that enters into a mechanical causal connection as succession and nearest cause, nor the self that takes the next step towards the goal of its ideal in the path of progress. Beyond mechanical consequences, directions and consistencies, and also beyond self-assigned ideals and programmes for the future, the self is only historical where it experiences itself affected, determined or intended through another person or something other:

History is not a connection of causes, it is a connection of affect and intention. This connection is the medium, in which one affection recognizes itself in the other – but does not recognize how it is in the other, rather recognizes how it is ‘meant’ by the other, as an instance of realization of its missed possibilities of happiness. Only because the present Now recognizes itself as ‘meant’ in a former one, as Thesis V has it, has the present been given the ‘weak messianic power’ to fulfil the demand for happiness of the previous one. History is structured messianically, for it is the medium of the possibilities of happiness of former times and is there in the medium of the possibility of happiness of happiness of the present. The historical moment is a moment not out of auto-affection, but out of a hetero-affection, in which the autos – in which the *kairós*, the happy moment – crystallizes. This moment has to be medium for itself as other.³²

This concept of *Antistory* does not only remain accountable to the future towards which its final fulfilment lay, but also to the present Now which contains within itself the messianic power of realisation and action. This present breaks history off from its chained existence and through that opens it up to the claims of the unhistorical, the immemorial; one that lies beyond the realms of lived reality. This present becomes the intentional prophecy of the past, presenting the unrepresentable, voiceless and the muted, fulfilling them away from the unvarying form of the linear continuity. Following Benjamin’s strain of thought, *Antistory* grounds itself on the fact that the subject of history cannot be the all-encompassing homogenous mankind that automatically progresses towards a historical consent and constant. Rather, the object of history should be a class, which is the class of the oppressed, the ones who have been denied, those deprived of their rights and exploited and such a history cannot be an automatic progression towards a predestined goal, already constituted in time and space, but one which in principle moves towards unforeseen realizations and is

³² Werner Hamacher. “‘Now’: Walter Benjamin and Historical Time”. *Walter Benjamin and History*. Ed. Andrew Benjamin. New York: Continuum 2005, p51. PDF.

forever philosophically open to the whirls of newer interpretations and understanding. It should carry within itself the anxiety and urgency of the messianic power which realizes and remembers the danger of not remembering, that even the dead can be killed off and can stop asserting their claim over the living, that every point of omission is also a point of a loss from where there is no return. It is only when history is in danger of becoming impossible that remembering sets in and it is at this juncture that the messianic *Antistory* begins its journey.

The *Antistory* begins with an overhauling of the postcolonial ethos which remains static in the contrasting immutable figures of the self and the other. As repeatedly shown earlier in the chapter, the postcolonial studies today require a new avenue of interpretation to grasp for itself the traces of the ancient past that is fast receding and vanishing. It is at this moment of crisis that the concept of *Antistory* hopes to re-open the dialogues of historical consciousness by removing it from the deterministic avenue of the knowable and in turn opening for itself a new voyage into the realm of the new Other, that lies beyond the scope of memory and forgetting. It is this Other that carries within itself the power of redemption of history, starting from a new point of dissatisfaction. Standing at the precipice where the ancient past can become forever silent, as we stand in danger of not only losing it but also its dynamic language, it becomes imperative for postcolonial studies to free itself from the inertia of a foreclosed past and give itself to the claims of the radically forgotten.

Antistory and the realm of the radically forgotten

If there is an initial forgetting, what it would make emerge must be an absolute immemorial: not a past that, having been present and thus already open and destined to memory, would afterward become inaccessible in memory or for memory, but a past that is initially past and originally lost: a past that is, in advance and essentially, in withdrawal from all future memory, a past that, simultaneous to its own passage and slipping away, is always already past, always already disappeared, and exists only as having disappeared. Heidegger frequently insisted on the doubling of forgetting: to truly forget, forgetting is not yet enough, for forgetting in memory that one has forgotten is only a mode of remembering—a mode that, precisely, permits us to rediscover what was forgotten. Complete forgetting, he shows, is forgetting the

forgetting, disappearance of the very disappearance, where the covering over is itself covered over.³³

Jean Louis Chrétien's concept of the radically forgotten becomes more interesting when one contextualizes it within the postcolonial framework. The act of remembering the forgetting becomes the mainstay of the postcolonial discourse as it delves into the silences of the archives which remained without a voice or a language of articulation in the historical project. The silences are not the lack of memory, but the lack of a discourse that can contain within it the multifarious and traumatic aspects of those voices which have been rendered mute. Thus, the postcolonial project became a re-examining of the fissures within the historical project and through such an enquiry, cull out the alternative, subverting and the subterranean narratives which till now have been forgotten. However, the resisting 'I' of these narratives contained itself within an answering back to the other 'I'—the colonial self. The postcolonial 'I' becomes forever caught up in a definition of itself that lies in being a negation of the colonial 'I', a meaning of the self that has already been formed in its story of lack. Chatterjee's idea of the 'borrowed imagined' becomes the best epithet to describe the foundering 'I' that was caught up in the tussle between the black and white, the good and evil, the dichotomous relations of the self and the other. This 'I' of the postcolonial narrative becomes the repetition of the desisting 'other' whose source of self began with a 'lack' and one whose identity is consumed in being the inversion of the narcissistic ideal white ego. Therefore, to free oneself from the legacy of the 'post' in the postcolonial, there is a need to go back to memory that began before the self of the postcolonial, one that has not only been forgotten, as even the act of forgetting is an act of memory, for to learn to forget, or being forced to do so, is also to remember the act as well as the circumstances that led to the act of forgetting, but whose forgetting has even been forgotten. It is this radical forgetting that consists within itself the power of redemption. It is a recollection that lies beyond the horizon of language and formation of the self, even before the identification of the self in the plain of the Imaginary. It is knowledge that never have been inscribed, fixed or engraved in the first place. To begin from forgetting is to begin from loss, however, in this, the idea of the loss has never even entered our selves; it is a loss which we are unaware of having lost:

For this forgetting expels not only a past, but an *other* past, a past other than any past where I am already human, a past other than any past of this incarnate life. Now this

³³ Jean Louis Chrétien. 'The Immemorial and Recollection'. *The Unforgettable And The Unhoped For*. Trans. Jeffrey Bloechl. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002, p1-2. Print.

other past—absolute, non-empirical, always already forgotten—is nonetheless that which opens me to the truth of being, and thus what alone can make of me what I am and what I am in so far as human... But this knowledge that precedes being human in us is also what founds our humanity... In the sense that Littre 's French dictionary gives to the word “immemorial,” it is “what is so ancient, that it leaves no memory.” The immemorial is what we lived before being human, and in order to finally be human, to be able to be human: what in us overcomes the human and exceeds it is what alone renders us human. There is an immemorial only for us humans and by us. This dimension radically separates the thought of recollection from that of the *a priori*.³⁴

This knowledge that precedes and predates us, is one that is the true arena of the immemorial wherein lies the ancient past. It is a past that is free from the dualistic inversion of the self and the other, one which lies beyond the territorial tension of the two antithetical forces that have come to define the postcolonial philosophy. It is the Other, one that encompasses all and yet one who lies beyond the constructed inertness of language. It is the home of the repressed past whose very repression has been forgotten, yet one which lies in and wait for its final redemption.

However, it has to be agreed upon that an understanding and giving in to the claims of the immemorial does not mean to return to that space of the past. To recover the doubly forgotten past is not to replant ourselves from the moment of the present into the a-colonial space of the immemorial. This recollection aims to make us recapture one that was always known and yet always forgotten, but in doing so, it does not wish to have as its end, a reconfiguring of us into what we were before, for whence we began. To do that would undermine and falsify the very aim of this project, we would cease to be what we are. As Plato stated, recollection is the properly human modality of knowledge, and not the reestablishment of a state anterior to humanity. The immemorial of knowledge that one must recollect and capture is one that gives us our understanding of the future, rather than receding us back to the past. It is for that promise to the future that one need to make this journey into the realms of the unknown ancestral immemorial. Thus, unlike the nationalist historical narrative whose agenda lay in ignoring the contemporary present and the hopeful future that carries the remnants of both that present and the past, and instead aiming at a pre-colonial future construct that harks to

³⁴ Jean Louis Chrétien. ‘The Immemorial and Recollection’. *The Unforgettable And The Unhoped For*. Trans. Jeffrey Bloechl. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002, p11-2. Print.

almost a pre-lapsarian moment of innocence and wholeness, *Antistory* unearths the immemorial Other to begin a new conception of the future, wherein the possibilities of the past that were missed and need to be remembered are both acknowledged and actualized:

The immemorial of a knowledge that one must recapture by uprooting forgetting is what gives us the future; it is what opens a future where rediscovering is not repeating, and where the second time of recollection does not at all reproduce the first, antenatal time. The absolute and pre-human past of the first vision produces the human future, granting it its perpetual resource. In this sense, we re-recollect ourselves only to the future, in seeking... We are the future of the absolute past, the future of the immemorial, and it is in this that it gives us what is ours concerning thought. All these determinations of Platonic recollection show that in it there is indeed a self, and that that self is properly in question. The thought of knowledge as recollection does not lead to an exercise of memory, but to an exercise of anticipation.³⁵

It is a desire for knowledge and the tension of the search for it that paves the path for *Antistory*, one whose proper temporal dimension is the future, a gift and an anticipatory opening into that future. *Antistory* therefore becomes the concept of recognizing the buried strands of the messianic/eschatological power that lies in the realms of beyond archival constructs of memory and forgetting through narratives that initiate from the archival history and then breaks down the static walls to deconstruct the archival foundations of History and bring it to the dominion of the Immemorial. It releases History from the garb of its objective position and takes the archives away from its ivory tower into the horizon-less arena of unachieved potentialities. It is only through an uncovering of this form of knowledge, can the postcolonial milieu free itself from the borrowed and the miserable imagining of its immediate past. It can finally unravel itself from the institutionalized restraint of a singular identity and revel in its multitudinous hues each of which carries a different narrative and yet each of them becomes a quintessential part of its many histories.

Having grappled with the question of what should the *Antistory* hope to unearth, it now becomes essential to address the second question which is pertinent in the scope of this work, that is, how is this immemorial space to be unearthed? Where and how does one find the tools

³⁵ Jean Louis Chrétien. 'The Immemorial and Recollection'. *The Unforgettable And The Unhoped For*. Trans. Jeffrey Bloechl. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002, p12-3. Print.

and more importantly the language that will be equipped to bear such knowledge? In one of his recent lectures at the India International Centre, New Delhi, Homi K. Bhabha expounded on a theory that he is working with in a new book of his. He provided just a small glimpse of the idea, one that he called 'Cathexis' and I would be taking in from that sliver of an idea and through it examine the question of the modalities to be looked for in carrying out the project of the *Antistory*. 'Cathexis' as expounded by Bhabha, refers to the afterlife of an event, after the memory traces have been amply interrogated. Bhabha believes that in case of certain events, the trauma of its past cannot be simply understood by reliving the event manifold times and through each of those re-creations and re-imaginings, achieving moments of catharsis. In the postmodern world, it is vital that the event be wrenched out of its immediate institutionalization and placed anew in newer points of the present in order to exact out of it multitudinous responses, each contrasting and contesting the other and yet each actualizing a promise out of the future, a promise that remain indelibly intertwined with the past in its realization. It is a movement away from the affect of the event, which is an embodiment of our emotions caught up in an obsessive translating of the memory traces into an extensive moment of history. Moving away from this thanatotic catharsis, it is time to embrace the concept of Cathexis, one that uproots the memory traces from their institutions and place them in newer forms. It is the reworking of the revision of memory, heterogeneous exciting of historical memory. It foregrounds that historical revision is not about just finding and fixing alternate history but about reiterative history that begins at a new place of dissatisfaction. Proceeding from such a point of dissatisfaction, *Antistory* is not merely interested in the voices of the past, but an ethical understanding of history and art in an agnostic sense. Looked through such a lens, *Antistory* becomes not merely the 'othering' of history, but an ethically conscious probing into the avenues of '*estorie*'. To achieve such a probing what is required is to first recognize the different points of memory that have remained dormant and yet in whom the active agents of the Immemorial lay, and bring them into dialogue with existing modes of study and history making. Once such an intercourse takes place, begins the breakdown of older modes of knowledge and the inception of new forms of thought. To articulate these novel and yet ancient pasts, *Antistory* then requires to break down language as we know and accept; it is to be subjected to the same forces of the immemorial as the present Now has been accustomed with. It is at this juncture that a new language will develop that will unshackle itself from the referential points of the colonial past and structure itself according to the polyphonous call of the immemorial.

***Antistory* and Amitav Ghosh's fiction**

As is evinced in the discussion above, *Antistory* gains its basic tenets from Benjamin's conceptualisation of History and its characteristics. Then, the question that becomes germane in this context then is why it is necessary to conceptualize a different theoretical term for this? The answer to this query becomes the foundation of this thesis work. Amitav Ghosh, a scholar of anthropology himself, has always conspicuously stayed away from the domain of writing history as he believes that fiction has given him a bigger canvas to subvert the normative conditions of history writing and research and given him newer avenues to unshackle history from its objective standpoint and channelize it towards the polyphonous heterogenous channels of subjective storytelling. This becomes amply clear from this excerpt of an interview:

Q: What makes you comfortable to write historical novels and not academic history?

Ghosh: I do not really know how to answer that. To put it simply, I am just not interested in writing academic history, mainly because it is just a different set of questions that one asks. In the first instance, I am interested in characters, in people, in individual stories, and the history is a backdrop. But there is a huge difference between writing a historical novel and writing history. If I may put it like this: history is like a river, and the historian is writing about the ways the river flows and the currents and crosscurrents in the river. But, within this river, there are also fish, and the fish can swim in many different directions. So, I am looking at it from the fish's point of view and which direction the fish swims in. So, history is the water in which it swims, and it is important for me to know the flow of the water. But in the end I am interested in the fish. The novelist's approach to the past, through the eyes of characters, is substantially different from the approach of the historian. 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 foundations³⁶.

³⁶Mahmood Kooria. 'Between the Walls of Archives and Horizons of Imagination: An Interview with Amitav Ghosh'. *Itinerario*, 36, 2012 pp 7-18. Web. 20.06.2015

This act of utilizing fiction for the motive of historical reconfiguration requires a different theoretical framework, one that is not merely embedded in theoretical praxis but one that is pliable and flexible to the demands of the other form of myth-making, that is, fiction. Therefore, *Antistory* becomes the intersection of the collusion of history and fiction, of historical fiction. While centring itself on the theoretical basics of Benjamin's concepts, *Antistory* extends itself to the myriad abstractions that fiction provides as well as dwells in.

It is with this concept of the *Antistory* and its various tropes that this work will aim to read Amitav Ghosh's fiction as a point of beginning for this new form of narrating the past. In the eight novels, which include the magnanimous *Ibis* trilogy, Ghosh's fiction has continuously dealt with the changing contours of the relationship between memory and history and its effect on the modern Western notions of nationalism, society, politics and identity. Through the theoretical framework that has been postulated in this chapter, we would now go into understanding the effect of such a mode of study on the existing identity politics of modern India. In a country where nationalism itself seems to have reached the dregs of its failed promises, it is imperative to look for newer avenues of defining and reviewing the nation and its discontents. Surveying Ghosh's fictional work through the lens of *Antistory* will not only open up the playing fields of identity politics in the country, one which is teetering on the edge of a critical breakdown, it will also raise issues and questions which will hopefully lead to a more nuanced understanding of the nation space. Beginning with Ghosh's foray into the personal to the final sweeping whirls of the narratives of the *Ibis* and the ensuing war with China, defining the political, economic, socio-historical space in the South Asian continent, this work will then look into Ghosh's own position as a writer and also the task of the historical fiction writer in the postcolonial tumultuous space.

Chapter 2

Mythicizing the Personal: Questions of travel, space and *anti-story* in *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines*

We who have not been allowed to be subjects of history, who have not been allowed to make our history, are beginning to reclaim our pasts and remake our future on our own terms.³⁷

A place on the map is also a place in history. - Adrienne Rich³⁸

Historicizing social structures through the tropes of ideas, plot frames and characters has been the bedrock of literary studies as it tries to engage into being both the mouthpiece of nation-building narratives as well as being points of subversion of those very narratives. Postcolonial narratives have since their inception grappled with this dichotomous task of both imagining the nation as free from colonial definitions, both literally and figuratively, as well as creating that same idea of the nation from the dregs of colonial history. While debunking the colonial authority over the formation of the new social ethos, it ironically founded itself on those same tenets and concepts of nation, freedom, liberty and politics, as enshrined by the colonial powers, as the cornerstone of this new space that it imaginatively calls a postcolonial imagined community. Therefore, the discourse that arises from this is one which is magnanimously skewed in its understanding as well as representation of its subjects. The subjects of this history remain the same turfs of colonial engagements, while the subaltern spaces, the spaces of the minor, the unspeakable, remains largely neglected or worse forgotten. Sten Pultz Moshund, in his *Migration Literature and Hybridity*, ponders over this

³⁷ Nancy Hartsock. "Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories" in *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*. Ed. Abdul JanMohamed & David Lloyd. New York: Oxford University Press (1990), p 25. Web.

³⁸ Adrienne Rich. "Notes towards a Politics of Location" in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985*. New York: Norton, (1986), p212. Web.

point of the subaltern's space in the midst of a literature that on the outset comes from a place of prejudice, alienating and elevating itself to a plane which lies oblivious to the ones that it has ironically set out to give a voice to. Moshund aptly surmises,

Anti-colonial discourse is seen not as an assertive discourse, but as a reactionary discourse animated by the political anger of the slave against the master. It is seen as a discourse of *ressentiment*, in Nietzschean term, not a creative and self-transformative will to power, but a will to power over another: anti-colonial discourse is seen as the mere reversal of fixed hierarchies and relations of power and, as such, incapable of ever yielding a discourse that can liberate us from a simple politics of retaliation and binary structures—the replacement of one authoritarian or major culture by another.³⁹

Even if in the eighties, there was a calculated move away from the anti-colonial discourses towards a narrative of self-sufficiency, there still was a lack in the engagement with voices that rise from the 'illegal' domains of histories, from spaces which more often than not unhinge and threaten the stabilised narratives of progress, unity, liberty and modernism. The 'fixed hierarchies' that Moslund wonders about still remain the mainstay of our narratives of both assimilation as well as retaliation. The exclusive national and ethnic identities that line the boundaries of the nation, often create an illusion of diversity and inclusivity which is paradoxically presented with a need to create monolithic stabilised fixed identities, hoarded up under the traditional identity markers like origin, nationality, bloodline, birthplace, roots and other such pointers. The nation and its stories have become an act of reaffirming the same idea of majoritarian domination where the minor are often put through the process of violent assimilation; the nation in its most developed form wants to be seen as a conglomerate whole rather than a varied landscape of differences. The binaries that the postcolonial narratives often find themselves enmeshed in even though began from a place of colonizer versus the colonised, has rapidly moved towards a new binary, a binary that divides the nation within the constricted groups of ones who reflect the majoritarian theory and the unnameable and therefore terrorising 'other' who is seen as the 'anti-national', one who refuses to subscribe to the accepted tenets of nationalistic zeal. In the first half of the twentieth century, with the two world wars, the decline of the British Empire as well as the

³⁹ Sten Pultz Moslund. *Migration Literature and Hybridity: The Different Speeds of Transcultural Change*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, (2010), pp-9-10. Print.

migration from the colonies to the West, a new class of illegal immigrants, who have been vomited out of the game of boundary-making, have arisen. These regurgitated entities, as they travelled on a perilous path to self-determination and identity formation, have been specifically left out of the nation-building History of the Third world as well as the newly assimilated white-collar multiculturalism of the First world; the minor has been lost in the upsurge of the major.

The sociological implication of this has been the eminence of a new ethos, a philosophy of major literature which bears all the characteristics of Deleuze's idea of the 'root-book': The root-book is an authoritarian or 'major literature' exercising a 'major usage of language', which means that it speaks in the standard, normative tongue: a pure language, policing the established codes of signification and, with that, preserving the dominant social order and its stratifications.⁴⁰ The root-book therefore enables a strong territorialisation, quite akin to Bakhtin's national myth, where the dominant culture and worldview is not only celebrated but is channelized as the only legitimate definition of the social structure. The question that arises in this is that in the onslaught of the majoritarian social world view and narrative where do the dissenting voices find themselves? The 'minor' literature, the multifarious voices, that would deterritorialize the constant and fixed rules of the monolithic language of the major, do they create a new language unto themselves? A minor literature cannot function as a destabilising catalyst of the major voice if it has to create a separate language of its own. The aim is to disrupt and fragment the homogenizing and uninterrupted flow of the major literature, one which can be achieved only through a restructuring of the major language itself. As Deleuze and Guattari state, the minor literature has to come from a space within the major language. The language that they are forced to serve should also become the language of their rebellion. The revolution needs to make the major language a tool of the minor, a disrupting agent that attacks all aspects of the major through its language:

How many people today live in a language that is not their own? Or no longer, or not yet, even know their own and know poorly the major language that they are forced to serve? This is the problem of immigrants and especially of their children, the problem of minorities, the problem of minor literature, but also a problem for all of us: how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the

⁴⁰Giles Deleuze & Félix Guattari. *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, (1986), pp26-7. Mentioned in Sten Pultz Moslund. 'Introduction'. *Migration Literature and Hybridity: The Different Speeds of Transcultural Change*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, (2010), p-7. Print.

language and making it follow a sober revolutionary path? How to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one's own language?⁴¹

This sense of alienation that pervades through the being of the Other is also the spark that can ignite and illuminate the path to a new poly-lingualism that dismantles the monochromes of the major, the edifices of History masquerading as the sole owner and definer of culture and tradition. This language of protest needs to fit itself into the different aspects of language which all come together to create the singular worldview of homogeneity. This deterritorialization of language has to happen through intercepting its various points of power and systematically unravelling them, unpacking language to its most basic, raw form and then re-territorializing it into a language of protest. Henri Gobard had identified four chief structures that any major language propagates itself through: vernacular or maternal language which operates at the level of the community; vehicular/urban/governmental language used in commercial exchanges; referential language which presents a sense of culture and tradition; mythic language which occupies the space on the horizon of culture, straddling the two worlds of the past and the present. For a minor literature to truly present itself, it requires to unpack all these four elements of their symbolic and practical modalities; minor literature can only then truly transgress the oppressive nature of language and utilise that very tool of exploitation to question and overturn the repression.

Amitav Ghosh in his first two novels, *The Circle of Reason* (1986) hitherto referred to as COR and *The Shadow Lines* (1988) hitherto referred to as SL, has exclusively dealt with the other side of History, the minor that has been forgotten in the metanarrative of the Nation and its victorious march towards a uniformed future. Both COR and SL construe themselves as parable like narratives which along with critically engaging with the pitfall of the idea of the nation, also tries to examine possibilities of alternate avenues of space politics. The questions of space, identity, language and finally borders become catalysts in building a theory of place politics which takes into account both the individual's choice of moving as well as looks at migration as a moment of profound rupture in the tapestry of official History. Both the narrators in the two novels suffer from a deep sense of unease reflecting on the stagnant narrative of history and the whirlwind of personal stories: it is a feeling which often dominates the mental and physical space of the migrant, the refugee. The twentieth century has been a witness to the grand spectacle of surge of movement in the form of refugees,

⁴¹ Giles Deleuze & Félix Guattari. *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, (1986), p19. Web.

globetrotting travellers, migrant workers, expatriates, exiles, wanderers of all kinds caught up in an immense uprooting of origins and belonging. As the boundaries of belonging became displaced and often lost, the borders became more prominent; as the cultural landscapes were getting reshaped and reimagined, the national landscapes became more rigid and unchanging. Ghosh in both COR and SL does not want to imagine a borderless society; he, like both his narrators, keenly understands the pitfalls of such utopian plans. However, what he does aim towards is to present his characters caught up in a moment of ‘rewriting... identities in order to evoke their impure and heterogeneous characters’⁴². Therefore, to critically engage with both of these novels, it becomes imperative to understand the tenets of fictions of migration and hybridity, comprehending their role in forming the bedrock of twentieth century literature.

Migration has been the single most important marker of identity formation, be it in terms of an individual, or a community or a nation in the twentieth century. With the multitudinous mingling of voices there was a sweeping aside the binaries that had shaped postcolonial ethos. In the late eighties, postcolonial studies made a paradigmatic shift from the dichotomous anticolonial standpoint and the emerging of national literatures of former colonies to a celebratory reading of migratory practices, border crossing and heterogeneity as its new muse. Bringing forth the disjointed and individualistic voices of a ‘mongrel world’ the transcultural migration writings with its transgressive discourse became a new mode of representation offering a pro-creative vision of the world, away from the polarised positions of East and the West, the master and the slave. Transcending all centralisations of meanings or ideological affiliations, migration therefore became the antidote to the essentialist narratives of homogenous nation spaces. Roy Summer in his *Fictions of Migration* identifies and categorises the host of migration based literature that came into the forefront post the 1980s under the two broad categories of Multicultural novel and the Transcultural novel. While the Multicultural novels views the cultural flux and the sense of unbelonging as a point of deviation from the normative homogeneity of the rooted nation and its cultural tropes, the Transcultural novel celebrates that very sense of uprootedness and cultural fragmentation as a liberating process. Summer further goes on to categorise these broad umbrella definitions into sub-categories. The multicultural novel gets subdivided into migration novel (ones dealing with the diaspora experience, something like Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies*) and

⁴² Sten Pultz Moslund. ‘Introduction’. *Migration Literature and Hybridity: The Different Speeds of Transcultural Change*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, (2010), p-3. Print.

the multicultural bildungsroman (documenting the second and third generation of immigrants and their search for identity and rootedness within the host cultures. For example Lahiri's *The Namesake*). The transcultural novel also is divided into two categories: a) the historical revisionist novel (one which deconstructs colonial history from multiple perspectives, eg David Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress*); b) the transcultural hybrid novel (ones that explicitly discuss the various facets of hybridity, migration, assertion of cosmopolitan hybridization and ethnic fragmentation, eg, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* or Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*). Interestingly it has been the transcultural hybrid novel which has gained the most popularity in re-visioning the postcolonial presentation of the polyglot worldview. These celebratory readings tend to valorise difference, multiplicity, transgressions while unanimously renouncing notions of rootedness, cultural uniformity and coherent continuity. These celebrations become milestones in the alternate readings of the edified History of the nations which have remained permanent in their dissemination of power and how it operates.

However, caught up in this frenzy of celebrating multitudinous identity-markers, what is often lost is the process of hybridization itself. The postcolonial celebration of the hybrid therefore, becomes paradoxically its own antithesis: rejoicing the already 'made' hybrid, one which is equally stunted, already formed and quite averse to flux. The bellicose hybrid that thunders against the sameness of the homogenous space becomes ironically a mirror image of its own adversary. In its bid to remove itself from the bipartisan politics of us versus them, it ironically finds itself in a theoretical political topography where it becomes an ideology-free zone, diluting the contours of those very differences it had set out to idealise and idolize. While on one hand, the spirited emergence of hybrid literature was a triumph of the fact that one was beginning to value fragmented identity, displacement and heterogeneity, on the other it was soon caught up in the fashionable rhetoric of the time, where nomadism and diasporism became in Eva Hoffman's words 'sexy, glamorous'⁴³. With the commodification of hybrid into one of the 'catchwords' of postcolonial and postmodern conditions, a litany of questions stares the anthropologist-writer like Ghosh as he aims to unlock the possibilities of an alternate narrative through both COR and SL:

Firstly, to the occidental ethnographer, immigrants, refugees, expatriates, nomads move in and out of their discourses of displacement as metaphors and symbols, but rarely become

⁴³ Eva Hoffman. 'The New Nomads' in Andre Aciman (ed.): *Letters of Transit. Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language, and Loss*. New York: The New York Press, (1999), p 44. Print.

producers of historically recognised critical discourses themselves. So, in such a case, how are they to be represented as critical voices without the risk of turning them into tropes of the fashionable ‘hybrid’?

Secondly, without dismissing the power of individual testimonies of displacement and exile, how can one refrain from creating ahistorical universalization that devalue those very testimonies?

Thirdly, is it possible to demystify the ahistorical universalization, which often brings together disparate experiences underneath one umbrella term, by strategies of localizations, geographic variations as an antidote to historical sameness? In other words, can locations and topographies be seen as new modes of understanding the diversity of hybridization as a phenomenon rather than studying the unchanging and universalised notion of the conglomerate hybrid?

Fourthly, is it conceivable to historicize the process of displacement and hybridization without falling into the ruse of leading ourselves in to the nostalgic dreams of returning home to a mythic, metaphysical location of ‘being at home’, of making the exile into an epic-styled journey which is forever distanced and yet the deference makes it seem more achievable?

These are questions which form the foundation of Ghosh’s narratives in COR and SL. Both of his texts resonate with the fundamental proposition that Caren Kaplan states, ‘While major critics have constructed an imaginary “homeland” of exiles throughout the twentieth century to house the unhoused, as it were, or to collect and manage the disparate cultural productions...it is interesting to consider the tension between location and dislocation or between nationalism and internationalism in their descriptive narratives.’⁴⁴ Ghosh realises that imperialist nostalgia that is embedded in postcolonial studies often erases collective and personal responsibility and replaces accountability with powerful discursive practices. The eulogising of the vanquished by the victors of History leads to a nostalgic articulation of a past which is twice removed and sanitised, first removed through the act of being voiced by one who has not lived it and second, articulated in a language which begins from a point of oppression of that very past. His background as an anthropologist prepares him for this problem of representation and this is acutely felt through the narration techniques he uses throughout COR and SL where the narrator is always already multiple in his singularity; the

⁴⁴ Caren Kaplan. ‘The Question of Moving’. *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Durham: Duke University Press, (1996), p30. Web.

narrative voice alternates among multiple points of articulation, voicing both the vanquished as the victor and the victor as the vanquished.

In most literary criticisms, both COR and SL have been read on the lines of nationalism and its problems, the postcolonial angst for clear definitions of a nation. This chapter acutely chooses to stay away more or less from the usual trodden critical readings of these two texts and instead wishes to look at these two texts as problematic of space and movement and through it understand the new avenues that Ghosh is traversing in de-structuring the postcolonial spirit. The nation is suspect in Ghosh's novels, that is a given. However, what remains to be delved into is the efficacy of the alternative community building concepts that his narrators propose through the course of the novels. Does the Ras which ends in destruction an ideal alternate nation space? If borders are superfluous methods of exclusion, then how do borders equally become points of inclusive identity marker? How does one begin to think beyond the universalising gestures of the masculine project of nation-building and through it rearticulate marginality? How does one negotiate the new boundaries of the terms centre and peripheries, instead of just merely putting them up as interchangeable binaries? These are some of the fundamental points on which this chapter would like to reflect as well as critically theorise on. However, there are certain points which will be taken as already agreed upon, as we delve into these concerns. Taking cue from Moslund's critical analysis of hybridity, this chapter will follow the basic tenets of Moslund's theoretical premise which are as follows:

1. Hybridity will be read not as an exceptional language of discursive transgression and liberation, but as a language that has in many cases become dominant and normative.
2. ...hybridity as a language of representation is often infected by hyperbolic tendencies which causes the creation of new centralisations of meaning as well as politicised and hierarchizing dualisms, for instance between the rootless and the rooted, the migratory and the sedentary, stillness and movement, hybridity and purity, heteroglossia and monoglossia.
3. Engage critically with the central binary opposition implied in migration and hybridity discourse between being and becoming, which casts the hybrid, nomadic and heteroglot as the only force of change as opposed to a supposed unchanging sameness of the settled and the rooted.

4. Explore the dynamic and complex readings that may arise if one dialecticise the binaries in transcultural hybridity discourse between the nomadic and the settled, the hybrid and the pure, the heteroglot and the monoglot and between the supposedly discontinuous *difference of becoming* and the continuous *sameness of being*.⁴⁵

As travel, leaving home, changing locations become the common truth that pervades across twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the questions of why and how we travel and the terms of our participation in this dynamic reality becomes the single point of introspection. ‘Yet it is no exaggeration to say that liberation as an intellectual mission, born in the resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism, has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages. From this perspective then all things are indeed counter, original, spare, strange’⁴⁶. It is this counter, this original that Ghosh wants to unravel and understand in COR and SL as it is this act of comprehension which can lead to novel ways of disrupting the hegemonic stories that masquerade as the real, as the historical.

The Circle of Reason

‘...a science can only tell you about things as they are; not what they might become.’⁴⁷ This statement encapsulates the basic struggle within COR as it tries to ascertain the extent of the gap that lies between the conception of an idea and its theory, and the actual practical realisation of it. COR contains within itself three separate threads of ideas that while indelibly linked with each other, also act as the antithesis of each other. Beginning with the homecoming of Alu (his good name Nachiketa being all but forgotten in the rest of the text, but one which resonates in his character) and closing with the flight of Alu and Jyoti Das into newer worlds, COR comprises within itself several journeys, physical, emotional, scientific and spiritual. Neatly divided into three sections, namely, Satwa (Reason), Rajas (Passion) and

⁴⁵ Sten Pultz Moslund. ‘Introduction’. *Migration Literature and Hybridity: The Different Speeds of Transcultural Change*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, (2010), p-11. Print.

⁴⁶ Edward Said. ‘Movements and Migrations’, *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publishers, (1993) p 332. Web.

⁴⁷ Amitav Ghosh. *The Circle of Reason*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India (1986.2008), p 22. Print.

Tamas(Death), the narrative voice craftily traverses among multiple time-zones, flitting from the distant past, past and the present, thus forming a voice that is both omnipresent and yet extremely personal. The shifting time-frames engulfing the readers into a whirlwind of ideas and incidents creates a sense of being at the calm centre of an on-going tornado; the reader being the proverbial eye of the storm. Different discourses work simultaneously within the course of the novel—discourses of global migration, bureaucratic power structures and most importantly science as an emblem of social mission and creator of alternate realities, invented and discovered from their obscurities by interested minds. The novel traces displacement at three levels—firstly migrants within the subcontinent, grappling with the spectres of memory and longing, secondly labour migrants who are stuck within the antithetical forces of being capital assets and non-belonging (the right to belong remains phantasmatic) and finally the legally accepted tourist traveller, Inspector Jyoti Das whose quest for the suspect Alu, makes him a global traveller. This chapter will divide the analysis into three sections, namely, the novel's understanding and positioning in terms of its engagement with Science as a social mission; the levels of displacement and their effect on the overall philosophy of the novel; the use of Indian knowledge systems and its efficacy in combating the social and political systems of modern governance.

Satwa or the problem with Reason

According to Yogic or Vedic knowledge systems, Nature is governed by three cosmic *gunas* which form the primal base of our natural consciousness. Satwa is the first of these *gunas*, and consists within itself,

... the quality of intelligence, virtue and goodness and creates harmony, balance and stability. It is light (not heavy) and luminous in nature. It possesses an inward and upward motion and brings about the awakening of the soul. Sattva provides happiness and contentment of a lasting nature. It is the principle of clarity, wideness and peace, the force of love that unites all things together.⁴⁸

Ghosh's nomenclature for the beginning of the novel follows from the central problematic of the position of scientific rationality in relation to the everyday lived reality. Stationing Balaram, the phrenology-obsessed uncle of Alu as fighting a war of rationality against the

⁴⁸ David Frawley. 'The Three Gunas: How to Balance Your Consciousness'. *American Institute of Vedic Studies*. Web.

irrational fear and propagandist ideologies of the social structure post-independence in the small town of Lalpukur, Ghosh's protagonists in *Satwa* are men who see themselves as pioneers of a new line of thought which would unshackle them from the societal bondages of class, caste and more importantly history, that till then have been the decision maker in their lives. Lalpukur with its past of displacement and living in squalor, both literal and metaphorical serves as the testing ground for Balaram for both his scientific passion for Pasteur's war on germs as well as his obsession for the pseudo-science of phrenology. Phrenology stands as an interesting point of debate in Ghosh's narrative as it mingles the two opposing theories of conjecture and reason into the problematic plane of universal scientific truth. While phrenology as a science had been discredited due to its whimsical nature, its refusal to take into account contradictory evidence and its most problematic tenet of proving the hypothesis first and then adding the steps to the probe as deemed fit, Ghosh's use of that same science as a point of obsession for Balaram, is not merely a plot strategy but rather a catalyst for the greater argument that Ghosh and his narrator are presenting. One of the clearest points of divide in terms of knowledge systems between the West and the East has been the pre-eminence that Reason or rationality finds in Western knowledge systems. This prominence of Reason is often credited to have helped in catapulting Western knowledge systems as being stated as being superior or better equipped for modern societies. Dressing up capitalist opportunistic ideas beneath the cloak of reason and universal knowledge has been one of the enduring tropes of colonizing nations to present themselves as superior to their colonies and through it give themselves the power of exploitation as well as provide a base for their continuance within the colonies. Therefore Science and scientific knowledge within the history of colonization have often been synonymously used as ideological apparatuses for the perpetuation of the colonial rule.

Phrenology in the novel works both as a plot catalyst as well as a symbol for the larger canvas of acquired knowledge systems that Ghosh is addressing in his narrative. Phrenology becomes the singular point of *peripetia* for Balaram as he immerses himself into its various tenets and slowly finds himself at a point where it becomes the guiding principle of his life as well as that of his understanding of the other. Balaram's description of Bhudeb Roy and likening it to his own physiology in their youth and the actual Bhudeb Roy that the readers encounter in the text become the first chasm that this pseudo-science had created.

Amalgamating the two extremes of scientific fact finding and the more abstract arena of prejudiced knowledge, phrenology becomes a symbolic representation of the relation

between colonial scientific education and the knowledge of the colonized other: both biased and yet parading as singularly universal. Balaram's obsession with the sciences also unravel the oft utilised trope of knowledge as a means of understanding and commenting upon the abstract and the distanced concept of the collective. His idea of a campaign against dirty underwear and relating it to Pasteur's fight against the common germ points towards a subversion—a questioning of the grand narratives that often remain as abstractions and are never seen to grapple with the now and the next of everyday human life. Balaram's quest lays bare the fundamental problem with colonial education which refuses to break the barriers of respectability and bases all knowledge on the theoretical rather than the practical vocational requirement of the student. Balaram therefore envisages a new form of education system that breaks science out of the mould of the distant 'Atom'—a school that forms its knowledge base from the lowest common denominator of 'need', stressing upon the importance of the individual as the germination point for the collective. The Pasteur School of Reason thus stands as an antithesis to standardized colonial education even though it ironically names itself after the basic foundation of western education: the prominence of Reason.

The School would have two main departments...one the Department of Pure Reason and the other the Department of Practical Reason: abstract reason and concrete reason, a meeting of the two great forms of human thought. Every student would have to attend classes in both departments. In the Department of Pure Reason they would be taught elementary reading, writing and arithmetic, and they would be given lectures in the history of science and technology...In the Department of Practical Reason, the students would be taught weaving or tailoring...it would be assumed that the students would carry on working...while they were studying at the school, so the classes would be held in the late afternoon and early evening.⁴⁹

While the School of Reason in its naming might remind the reader of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Reason*, the similarity continues in the elementary concepts guiding the school. Kant's concept of a synthetic posterior knowledge that is available to all is the founding principle of Balaram's quest for meaning through the principles of phrenology that bases itself on synthetic posterior knowledge which can indicate the future of a man's nature based on his skull's contusions. It is through this knowledge that Balaram decides that Shombhu Debnath will be the best teacher to guide his school, all the while being completely unaware

⁴⁹ Amitav Ghosh. *The Circle of Reason*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India (1986.2008), p 116. Print.

of Debnath's personal enmity towards Bhudeb as his guiding principle to join the school or his humiliation of Bhudeb Roy by criticising the Saraswati idol during the school festival which he believed would lead to betterment instead of the doom that he had willed upon him and his family. The School also becomes a mouthpiece, through its continuous engagement with the subaltern spaces within Lalpukur, to bring forth the other side of history—the personal—on to the forefront of academic arena. One of the most important parts of the curriculum for the school is the insistence on cleanliness and the use of carbolic acid as an agent and harbinger of a cleaner society, both literally and figuratively. The carbolic acid that Balaram stores in drums and unleashes on anyone who yields power through intimidation becomes much more than a cleansing agent and an antiseptic. It becomes a physical manifestation of the greater war that Balaram is fighting: the war of Reason against the growing rabble rousing politics of new identities, capitalism and vote politics. Interestingly, however, 'capitalism is equated with the Germ for Balaram, without being aware that his rival, capitalism and his weapon (of reason) are complimentary in the context of colonization'⁵⁰. Balaram's equating of cleanliness with moral fortitude is reminiscent of Mahatma Gandhi's concept of cleanliness as the threshold of acceptance within the normative social structure for the *harijan*. However, Ghosh's narrator is sceptical and critical of such a singular point of reference as the deciding point for assembling of social structures as that often makes one oblivious to the multifarious social forms that actively participate in the power struggle of social domination. Lalpukur, the last bastion of the disenfranchised becomes a scathing critique of this idealised simplification that Balaram indulges in as he launches himself into the idealistically motivated task of creating a community that functions on theoretical precepts of goodness and romanticism triumphing over the evil of material reality.

Reason in the novel is equated with knowledge and truth, ones which are based on empirical experience rather than metaphysical and spiritual truths. This pre-eminence of the empirical derived from the British educational system becomes the point of contention within the narrative. As Laskar points out, 'the novel makes an ironic commentary on the British educational system and its sole concern with the propagation of rationality, through the failure of Balaram and his protégé Alu... Through this uncle-nephew pair, Ghosh also examines the paradox inherent in the concept of reason "which is both liberating and

⁵⁰ Samrat Laskar. 'Trapped in the Circle: A Postcolonial Critique of "Reason" in the Circle of Reason' Ed. Tapan Kumar Ghosh & Prasanta Bhattacharya. *In Pursuit of Amitav Ghosh: Some Recent Readings*. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, (2013) p107. Print.

oppressive; linear and straight-forward, and circular and convoluted; reasonable and unreasonable”⁵¹. This tug of war between the antithetical elements of reason is played out best through the character of the place within which the drama unfolds: Lalpukur. The physical space that Lalpukur finds itself in is a literal representation of the stagnant history that it encapsulates within itself, one that makes it paralysed to conceive for itself a future. Stranded between the nation-making frenzy of the Indian state on one hand and the terrorised other side of the border, whose ‘rattle of distant gunfire’ lulled Lalpukur into a troubled sleep, Lalpukur and its residents are caught up in a dystopia of nostalgic memorialisation: ‘Lalpukur could fight no war because it was doomed to a hell of longing. The vocation of the melancholy is not anger but mourning’⁵². Lalpukur finds itself represented through two antithetical viewpoints of the official historical space and the individual space as conceived by a Balaram and Alu in the first part of COR. To understand these two representations of the same space, it is first imperative to look at Doreen Massey’s reading of the different aspects that a place can converge within itself. In modern readings of the place-time nexus, time has always been conceived as dynamic and changing while place is seen as its static counterpoint. Massey breaks this unilateral power structure by freeing place from the singularity of meaning and instead re-inventing it as ‘internally heterogeneous, dialectical and dynamic configurations’. Stuck in a history where the state has abdicated the responsibility for meanings of the past in the present, Lalpukur therefore finds itself re-engaging itself in multiple meanings, all of them in a state of constant flux. For the villagers, Lalpukur is that last fortress beyond which lay the horrors of a war which often sought it to be the ‘dumping ground for the refuse from tyrants’ frenzies’⁵³. For Bhudeb Roy, the influx of the refugees from the war torn border makes Lalpukur the breeding ground for his parasitic capitalistic practices which finds its most apt representation in selling off the scraps of a shot down war plane to the refugees, the very symbol of a war which had made them homeless in the first place. The refugee colonies that sprung up in the different corners of Lalpukur, housing the broken and the disenchanting, invested the strip of land that Lalpukur is with the nostalgic longing of the displaced. Mingling together the disparate yet similar memories of displacement and unbelonging, the past and the present of Lalpukur materialise itself in the literal spatial representation of its physical space which would be ‘convulsed with growing pains’(65) in its bid to accustom itself to its distorted and disfigured future. It is in this

⁵¹ Ibid. p105

⁵² Amitav Ghosh. *The Circle of Reason*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India (1986.2008), p 64. Print.

⁵³ Ibid. p64.

distortion that Balaram finds his project—Lalpukur transforms for him into the laboratory of his experiments with the scientific and social tenets of his principles of rationality and reason:

So Balaram started a campaign. He went around the shanties, warning people of the swift death they were calling on themselves. He called meetings and urged them to contribute what they could to buy carbolic acid. People listened to him, for they knew he was a schoolmaster, but they hesitated. It was not till he started a fund with a bit of his own money that they threw in a few annas and paisas. Soon, they had enough to buy a fair quantity of disinfectant. Then, very systematically, with the help of a few volunteers, Balaram began to disinfect every exposed inch of the new settlements.⁵⁴

While Balaram brings forth the nationalistic fervour of development and uplifting the displaced through his zealous projects of both disinfecting the colonies as well as starting the School of Reason which would provide the people a platform to become self-dependent, Shombhu Debnath, the drugged yet brilliant master weaver and a teacher as his School of Reason brings forth the hollowness of this rhetoric. Shombhu Debnath serves as an anarchic catalyst in the space politics of Lalpukur, whose two extremes are represented by Bhudeb Roy and his capitalistic enterprise on one side and Balaram and his socialist state-building on the other. Positioning himself within the fringe space of Lalpukur, the first anecdote about him in the narrative is how he lived in the trees and survived on its sap, Debnath is interestingly named after the Hindu god Shiva, the lord destroyer. This religious motive is further realised through his actions, first in his chaotic life style where his young daughter has to become the breadwinner of the family and more so in his impregnating Parvoti Debi, wife of Bhudeb Roy, thus bringing in its wake a ‘pralay’ quite similar to the one in the myths which results in the death of the mythological goddess Parvati, only in this case, the Parvati’s fate is played through by Balaram and his family.

Lalpukur also posits itself as a moment of revolt through the language that it speaks. Carrying within itself the ghosts of the displaced and lost places of the past that form its origin, the language becomes a mode of subversion against the changing politics of the space that these people now inhabit. It is an act of rebellion of the people forcefully uprooted from their places of origin, leaving behind a history which can now only be visited through the nostalgia of the language spoken:

⁵⁴ Ibid. p66.

Most of the people of Lalpukur belonged originally to the remote district of Noakhali, in the far east of Bengal close to Burma. They had emigrated to India in a slow steady trickle in the years after East Bengal became East Pakistan. Most of them had left everything but their dialect behind. It was a nasal sing-song Bengali, with who knew what mixed in of Burmese and the languages of the hills to the east? Many of them had learnt the speech of West Bengal, but it had only made their own dialect more dear to them—as a mark of common belonging and as a secret weapon to confuse strangers with.⁵⁵

The spatial politics gets further nuanced through the changing timeframes of the narrative which vacillates between the singular topographical unit of Lalpukur which housed multiple points of opinion and the travelling topography of Jyoti Das, the inspector in charge of Alu's case who follows these multiple story points into a singular point of convergence: finding out where Alu is. The shifting timelines invest the topographies with a dual perspective: on one hand the reader becomes an audience to the making of history while on the other he is faced with an edified and coded History that ignores, forgets and violently suppresses the multiplicity of truths. This is best employed through the parallel narratives of Alu's and Jyoti Das' childhoods, where the contrast between the suburban violent history of Alu seems to tame the city bred government official life of Das' family. These two parallel stories serve as a remembrance, a stream of consciousness that brings together disparate memory strands, while also extracting the nuances of simultaneous and yet contesting truths that official History often ignores or buries under its universality. Ghosh shows the two sides of the story of nationalism, both ignorant of its pitfalls and parading as the righteous way of nation-building. On one hand while Balaram's Scientific Reason fails to bridge the divide between the idealised version of society and the reality of it, ultimately leading to his death, on the other hand, the desperate respectability of the middle class lifestyle of Das wherein the government job stands as the one true marker of upward social mobility and finding a place in this new nationalistic narrative leads to nothing but a disintegrating and deadening of the individual, one who 'knew it to be ordained for him to redeem his father's failures... becoming a Class I officer—of whatever kind, in the administration, in the police, in the railways, it didn't matter'⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p29.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p40.

Reason, as a plot trope, often indelibly links itself to its antithesis—desire, hope, love, obsession and insanity—throughout the novel. Balaram’s statement made during the first part of the novel, ‘Science doesn’t belong to countries. Reason doesn’t belong to any nation. They belong to history—to the world’⁵⁷ reinforces the position of science within the dominant narrative of History which looks at events as a causal link towards a grand march of Progress. His constant reiteration of rejection of all things native as irrational and therefore not worthy of discussion draws back to the colonial distrust and ridicule of indigenous systems of knowledge. However, through Balaram’s actions, which are more often than not whimsical, unpredictable and selfish, Ghosh shows the inadequacy of this rational school of thought as one which is nothing but a political move for dominance. The failure of the project of Reason, that also marks the end of the first part of the novel, grounds the failure of the project of History to causally justify timelines through the lenses of reason and scientific temper. Through it Ghosh finally enables histories of places, spaces and timelines to uproot and subvert the universal homogeneous narrative of frozen time and space, otherwise referred to as History.

Rajas or the pathos of passion

Displacement and destruction run as parallel themes within the text as Alu and his fellow travellers in Mariamma chart their ways through the treacherous seas to reach the Promised Land like devotees in search of salvation. The concept of exile has been one of the major symbolic movements of the modernist age, culling its meaning from political, social, economic and the lived experiences of populace moving from one part of the globe to the other either due to war or to find themselves without a country to call their own. However, the meanings of exile since then have undergone vast changes to represent an aesthetic that forms the foundation of the new world—the world of the self-exiled nomad. The new definition of the exile therefore ‘marks a place of mediation in modernity where issues of political conflict, commerce, labour, nationalist realignments, imperialist expansion, structures of gender and sexuality, and many other issues all become recoded’⁵⁸. The postcolonial exile is often one who is straddling multiple identities, while at the same time

⁵⁷ Ibid. p54.

⁵⁸ Aijaz Ahmed. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. London: Verso, (1992), p85-7. Mentioned in Caren Kaplan. *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Durham: duke University Press, (1996), p28. Web.

nostalgically harking to a past/home that is forever deferred in memory, one that can be only reached through a re-imagined memory. The homeland is both yearned for and yet shunned for its failure to live up to the promise of providing the exact incentives that the nation state seduces with—the all-pervasive rights of the citizen. It is interesting to mark that the second part of the novel, *Rajas*, which in Vedic phraseology would refer to passion that encapsulates both pleasure and pain, begins with the destruction of the Star: a building that represents the new order. *Rajas* explores a madness that lies inherent in the breaking down of old orders of citizenship and belonging and the formation of new structures of legitimization.

The unravelling of old structures of validation begins at the nascent stage of history making—the project of story-telling. Zindi's act of narration would substantiate the myth-making process that is required for a space to be imbued with layers of symbolic meaning:

They had lived through everything Zindi spoke of and had heard her talk of it time and time again; yet it was only in her telling that it took shape; changed from mere incidents to a palpable thing, a block of time which was not hours or minutes or days, but something corporeal, with its own malevolent wilfulness...they could never tire of listening to her speak, in her welter of languages ...And when sometimes she chose a different word or a new phrase it was like the pressure of a potter's thumb on clay—changing the thing itself and their knowledge of it.⁵⁹

Unlike the narratives of nation in *History* which remain unaltered within the realms of time, the new community that is built in through Zindi's narrative is ever-changing and always at the risk of being lost in reiteration. Just like the inhabitants of the Ras as well as Zindi's household who remain as nomadic impressions on the continuous plane of the space's history, their stories also add to the ever changing winding narrative that forms the sense of the 'imagined community' within the Ras.

However, Ghosh is aware that even such an alternatively imagined space of community is vulnerable to the challenges of legitimacy and acceptance that remain the most fundamental of human desires in their quest for stability. The nationscape is accepted as a point of power only when it can offer to its inhabitants the rule of citizenship, one that forms a vow of protection, mutual power and validation between the space and the person inhabiting it. It is interesting that Ghosh names the second part of his novel as *Rajas*, a state of unbridled

⁵⁹ Amitav Ghosh. *The Circle of Reason*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India (1986.2008), p 228. Print.

passion as he tries to capture the desperate acts of belonging that the figure of the migrant would put themselves through in order for a legitimacy which ironically in its very nature is directed to reject them. Spanning over ten chapters *Rajas* becomes a lens through which the readers are given a view of the insecurity, madness and desperation that forms the voice of all migrant narratives. Through three powerful moments in the stories of three different migrant points of view, COR tries to delve deeper into the relationship that is shared between a place and its inhabitant and more importantly the role that topography plays in identity creation for an individual, group or a race.

The first of these moments even though comes towards the end of the earlier *Satwa*, yet creates the platform for the questions of space and politics of belonging that one explores in *Rajas*. Karthamma, one of the migrant workers travelling in *Mariamamma*, during her labor which comes while the ship is in the middle of the ocean, refuses to give birth to her baby as she deliriously keep asking for forms that would allow the child to be seen as a valid citizen:

She says she won't deliver without signing the right forms. That's what she says. She says she'll keep it in for as long as she has to... She says that she knows that the child won't be given a house or a car or anything at all if she doesn't sign the forms. It'll be sent back to India, she says, and she would rather kill it than allow that to happen; kill it right now with a bottle while it's still in her womb.⁶⁰

Karthamma's demands for forms brings into light two important points of introspection: firstly, the question that arises in the minds of the other inmates of *Mariamamma* which is, how can an uneducated woman like Karthamma who cannot even identify the father of her child be adamant about forms that would give her child the legitimacy of being a citizen; secondly, to the mobile migrant what does the idea of citizenship hold within itself? The answer to the first question is presented within the text itself where the Professor surmises that the touts who bring in these illegal migrant workers often promise legitimacy of citizenship to lure such workers into the web of bonded labour. The second question however, requires some contemplation about the changing nature of ownership that marks the idea of countries and boundaries now. Globalisation and the movement of people from one space to the other, for work, survival or pleasure, have opened up the possibility of transforming the way we think about citizenship—a concept which till now was defined by its nature of stasis, an unchanging and unmoving asset of the individual in relation to the space he/she inhabits. In

⁶⁰ Ibid. pp189-90

light of these migrant subjectivities, a new form of citizenship, a citizenship ‘from below’ has emerged which is bringing out new potential of re-imagining space politics while also persuading social justice to be conceived in novel ways to represent these new situations. ‘For example, sanctuary movements, No Border Politics and Don’t Ask Don’t Tell campaigns put forward different normative visions of the future, in which notions of belonging and entitlement to rights are founded on criteria of residence, participation in community, and social relations developed in space... This is in contrast to the current liberal measure for citizenship and entitlement grounded in legal status, stasis and location in bounded space, documentation, exclusion and private property’⁶¹. This new dynamic citizenship, marking the migrant as a non-citizen while allowing him to participate in the playing field of citizenship through new ways of claiming power. Thus, while a Karthamma finds herself entrapped in the old visions of static citizenship which is marked by accumulation of accepted tokens of belonging, what Al Ghazira allows for the migrants in the narrative is a radicalised new form of citizenship which allows the migrant non-citizen to participate in the political and social space as de-facto citizens despite lacking political and legal status or documentation of belonging.

Ghosh’s narrator further explores the question of belonging through two very disparate characters, Mast Ram and Professor Samuel. Mast Ram, in the narrative, stands as a personification of the death that hounds the migrant—not a physical death, but a death of one’s being, of those very tenets that makes one an individual, in an attempt to mould oneself to belong to the new space. Mast Ram enters Zindi’s house in a moment of absolute surrender; he has been beaten up and his skull cracked as he had dared to be indignant about the false promises which were made to him by his employer about his remuneration. As he tries to accommodate himself into the new niche of the migrant space, he realises his failure to attune himself to the ways of this new form of belonging. This is most poignantly put forward through the allusion of his deathly touch which ends up killing anything that he supervises:

In the middle of all that stories about Mast Ram began to reach the Ras: how a live flowering bush had withered and died moments after Mast Ram touched it; how Abusa’s

⁶¹ Peter Nyers and Kim Ryzgiel. *Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement*. Oxon: Routledge, (2012),p9. Web.

pumpkins, each one the size of a fattened sheep, were opened and found to be hollow as footballs after Mast Ram had watered them.⁶²

The death that surrounds Mast Ram, the hatred, envy and loneliness that forms his story, forms the foundation of the ethos of the alien non-citizen that the migrant is plagued with. Mast Ram's death by fire, which threatens to engulf the whole of the Ras and can only be saved after all the Ras dwellers come together in a 'battle which lasted through the night.' (228), can be read as a trial by fire that the migrant must endure and go through to make his claim for validation in the land that he has adopted.

While Mast Ram's story etches out the desperation of the migrant to assimilate into the new surrounding giving in everything that earlier defined him, the Professor's story reiterates the inherent difference between the migrant and his adoptive place which refuses absolute assimilation to him, always regarding him with the suspicion of the outsider. Working as a manager's assistant in a huge supermarket in Hurreyya Avenue, the Professor's job was an enviable one as all he had to do was 'add numbers' (223). His employers however found it profitable as 'they paid him less than they should have because he had no work permit' (224). The incident of the Professor losing his job begins innocuously with him waking up early to get to his job when he found 'that he had no clean trousers to wear. So, neat as ever, he tied on a starched white lungi and went off' (224). His inability to remember the Arabic word for prawn and the ensuing miscommunication with a customer due to the gap in language as an event evokes tragic laughter where the language gap is made into a hilarity when the Professor, first absent-mindedly pulls his lungi up, alarming the woman customer and next in a moment of farcical hyperbole cries out '*Gambari!* Oh, *gambari!*...flinging his arms open and rushing towards her, Come, Madam, come, I will show you *gambaris* like you've never seen...' (225). However, this hyperbole is soon changed into a moment of absolute breakdown of the migrant figure who lies amidst broken bottles of American ketchup (a tacit reminder of the age-old obsession with the American Dream where every individual can achieve his dreams and its ultimate failure) as he feebly tries to explain and fails miserably. The betrayal of clothes, language, affects and behavioural patterns marks the migrant as always on the other side of the line of belonging and infuses in him a life-long quest for an idealised assimilative space which remains cruelly deferred.

⁶² Amitav Ghosh. *The Circle of Reason*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India (1986.2008), p 222. Print.

Ghosh while showcasing the usual ‘us versus them’ relation of the citizen and the migrant, does not taper off the discussion in it, instead through the figure of the Ras, a space that stands as the realisation of alternate forms of belonging and legitimacy, delves deeper into a study of new modes of citizenship. To explore than further, it would be pertinent to look into Engin Isin’s interesting work on the concept of activist citizenship. Engin Isin uses the term ‘activist citizenship’ to characterise newly emerging types of citizen subjectivities in contrast to the ‘active citizen’ more traditionally associated with the politics of modern liberal citizenship. Isin argues that in contrast to the active citizen, identified with traditional citizenship roles such as voting, military service and paying taxes, ‘activist citizenship’ refers to struggles and acts that present a sense of making a break, a rupture, a difference.⁶³ Reading citizenship through migrant agency helps in disrupting the power centres which view the migrant as antithetical to the citizen and enables a fluent exchange of subjective positions between the two. Breaking down the walls of exclusivity that surrounds the knowledge structures of the migrant as well as the citizen, the Ras in COR moulds itself into an arena of alternate subjectivities, where the non-citizen migrant has an equal and sometimes even greater power than the citizen figure in determining the contours of the space it inhabits. The conception of this new model of the Ras begins through the story of Nury and his death which bears testimony to the transfer of powers from the old systems to the new ones where the means of production become the singular point of concentration of authority. The transfer of command from the Malik to the Oilmen who brought in illegal migrant workers to counter the clout of the Ghaziris present the precarious balance on which lies the questions of legitimacy and rightful owners of a place. As the Ghaziris are bombed out and the Malik is made into a prisoner in his own palace, the death of Nury, the egg-seller marks the demise of a form of citizenship that grew out of a relationship with the land, an organic understanding of the traditional and indigenous knowledge structures and lifestyles, making way for a form of citizenship based on documentation and legal hoops, contouring the land into political maps bounded on all sides by borders of difference.

Ghosh’s migrants however look towards creation of a new form of citizenship and ownership, one that is not enslaved to the means of production and its driving force, money. When Alu proclaims, ‘We shall war on money, where it all begins’ (Ghosh: COR, 260) it presents a very intriguing picture of a social order where the determining factor would be away from the

⁶³ Peter Nyers and Kim Rygiel. *Citizenship, Migrant Activism and the Politics of Movement*. Oxon: Routledge, (2012),p10. Web. Google Books.

economic base which creates all modern places on the map. Therefore what is being conceptualised is a space which goes away from the confines of modern map-making and forms its own rules of belonging. The first point of this new structure is to discredit the older one through those very terms that had been the muse for modern discoveries in the novel: the Germ. Terming money as the Germ that travels from man to man, ‘sucking people out and destroying them even in the safety of their own houses...which is the battleground which travels on every man and every woman, silently preparing them for their defeat, turning one against the other, helping them destroy themselves’ (302), Alu and the Professor envisage a community that can be built by eliminating the root-cause of the impersonal capitalist space, a space which is devoid of the biggest symbol and aid for the survival of capitalist structure—money. The new structure would be a paper economy:

First, he said, he would open files, with a page for every earning person in the Ras. Everyone would take their pay to him as soon as they received it, and the sum would be entered in the files against that man’s or woman’s name. The money would go into a common pool. Once a week the Professor and whoever wished to go with him would go into the Souq and buy everything that was needed in the Ras with that money. Then people could come and take whatever they needed, and the cost would be taken out of their accounts...Every person in the Ras who wished to fight this war would also have to tie a piece of cloth above his right elbow. And whenever they left or entered a dwelling in the Ras they were to use that bit of cloth to dust the threshold, so that they left no dirt behind nor carried any with them. In this way, he said, they could know who was with them, and who against, and they could carry their fight to every doorstep.⁶⁴

If one takes the idea of this new utopian structure, there are two major points on which it hinges itself. Firstly, the concept of the community as the economic baseline, erasing the need for individual betterment as the sole determinant of prosperity, as well as removing the aspect of desire from the economy and replacing it with ‘need’ which would rein in the excess. The second point however, is the more critical one, as it delves into the question of marking oneself as a participant with a visual motif, a constant reminder of one’s commitment to the cause. The tying of a cloth on the arm is eerily reminiscent of the ghettoization of the Jews and their Star of David armbands as well as the idea of austerity that was pedalled as the principle agenda of the concentration camps. The visual reminder of the

⁶⁴ Amitav Ghosh. *The Circle of Reason*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India (1986.2008), p 303-4. Print.

cause serves two purposes: first, it weeds out the non-believers from the believers and creates a clear distinction between the two; second, it is a reiteration of the same markers of belonging which are the hallmarks of the very capitalist exclusive structure that the Ras is trying to outrun—identity informers like a passport, voting rights, tax payment, all of which gives you a legitimate claim to belong to the structure. It is this resemblance and extension from the earlier structure which makes this neo-liberated alternate site the cause of its own failure.

The first point where the new economy fails is through its tacit acceptance of the earlier system's law of differentiation—power is still vested in the hands of those who control the pay books, which in this case are the Professor and Hajj Fahmy. Secondly, this extreme utopian arrangement robs the right of the individual to have a say in the mode of production or his willingness to join in the community thus formed. The individual becomes an unwilling puppet in the hands of a system that reduces him, just like the capitalist system, into a mere number, a machine that should show obedience, a part of the multitude, killing off his individual impulses. This is best expressed through the case of the individual businessman Romy Abu Tolba who has to give away his shop to the Ras out of desperation as the new system made it impossible for him to survive as an individual. They first fumigated the shop with carbolic acid to take away any trace of individualism that it might still carry and then once the new shop was born out of its own ashes, they installed Romy there as an empty symbol of their own diktats:

Romy's just a clerk now, in his own shop. He spends the day noting down who buys what in the account-books. They pay him a wage. It's not a bad wage, but you can already see death weighing down his eyelids. Who wants to be a paid clerk in his own shop?⁶⁵

Therefore the activist citizenship that Alu envisages through the death of the Germ, essentially becomes Frankenstein's Monster, taking away that very agency that it has proclaimed to save and cherish. The revolt that begins the Rajas fizzles into another autocratic structure that thrives on the very ideas of the all-powerful citizen and the disenfranchised Other that was the hallmark of the last one.

⁶⁵ Ibid.p325.

Rajas, which starts with the destruction of the Star, a symbol for the old capitalist order, ends with the destruction of the alternate order which aims to give the migrants a position of rebellion and yet miserably fails them by accommodating those self-same channels of exploitation. Alu identifies the monster figure much earlier than the others, a sense of *déjà vu* playing its part in bringing back the ghosts of his own past of madness which saw his uncle Balamram obsessively stumble into the same path of destruction:

Alu wasn't weaving any longer, but he wasn't watching, either. He was looking in front of him, totally bewildered. You had only to look at him to know that the whole thing was beyond him now. He could no longer understand what he'd started. (340)

You must stop this: this is madness...Balamram-babu, you will destroy everyone without even stopping to think about it. You're the best sadhu I've ever known, Balamram-babu, but no mortal man can cope with the fierceness of your gods. (153)

Rajas, ending with the destruction of the Ras, also signify the death of passion, a sentiment that rules the first two parts of the novel. The armed attack on the members of the Ras and the flight of Alu, Zindi and Karthamma's baby as the sole survivors of this alternate historical narrative, signal the failure of the governing agency of the novel: the power of Reason and Scientific knowledge. It is Zindi, with her indigenous knowledge systems, who is far more adept at surviving than an Alu who remains nothing but an empty shell at the end of Rajas, devoid of all the principles that formed his self. As Zindi succinctly clarifies, 'All you ever talk about is rules. That's how you and your kind have destroyed everything—science, religion, socialism—with your rules and your orthodoxies. That's the difference between us: you worry about rules and I worry about being human.'(442)

Tamas or the beginning of Ends

Throughout the novel, Ghosh utilises the Jyoti Das, the inspector as a foil to the idealistic stand of both Balamram and Alu. Das, with his childhood and adulthood hurtling him towards the self-same goals of the respectable Bengali middle class, stands as a sharp contrast to the convoluted paths that Alu embarks on in search of his future. Tamas in Vedic philosophy refers to a time of darkness, one which is characterised by delusion, absence of faith and

unforgiveness. However, the final part of COR carries within it a singular feeling of hope that rises as a challenge to the death and destruction that precedes it. While the deserts of the Algerian Sahara provide Alu and Zindi along with Boss, the baby a perfect camouflage to restart a life away from the ideologies of greatness and utopic excesses, it presents Das with the singular desire to cause the death of his present self and finally embrace his alter ego of an artist who till now has been pushed into obscurity. Even though Pasteur does make an appearance and tries to claim its place within this new altered emotional topography, it is Alu who assures its final demise by letting its madness be purified in the holy pyre of death.

There are a number of deaths that pepper the breadth of the last section of COR, from the metaphorical death of the play that they were planning to put up, the death of the old Zindi, Alu and Kulfi as they don on the new personalities of a family in transit in order to hoodwink Das, the death of the meek and mild self of Mrs Verma as she stand up to fight for what she believes are the basics of humaneness that the society around her seems to have given up on and the actual death of Kulfi who dies of a heart attack in the middle of rehearsals for the play. Each of these deaths play a role in grounding the overall philosophy that Ghosh's narrator is trying to espouse in the narrative. Much like the afterword of the Mahabharata, where the death of the entire clan of the Pandavas forces them to introspect on the essential failure of the philosophies of righteous anger and justice, Tamas in COR acts as a point of introspection for both the characters and the reader as both grapple with the aftermath of death of the accepted norms of social structure in the hands of an extremism that slowly seeps into it in a bid to erase and obfuscate the other. The play that they choose to perform, Tagore's *Chitrangada*, stands as a motif to the questions of identity, transformation, belief and truth that remain at the heart of the narrative of COR. Based on one of the stories from Mahabharata, *Chitrangada* tells the story of the warrior princess Chitrangada who falls in love with Arjun and realises that her masculinised nature as a warrior would never allow her to be seen as a love interest. So, she asks for a boon to change her into a feminine frail beauty who ensnares Arjun with her beauty. Yet, in the end it is her inherent warrior nature, as she saves villages from marauders, that makes Arjun sees her as an equal and love her more for that. *Chitrangada* stands as an example of the multiple selves that one performs in order to what one believes social structures desire them to be. It is ironic that Kulfi falls in love with Das as disguised as the wife of another, a position that gives her acceptance within the social platform, yet as she desires for Das, it is only in moments before her death that she can completely forget her created self and embrace the self that she had hidden. It is tragic that

even in death she has to continue with the play-acting, played up posthumously by Alu as he shaves his head in accordance to Hindu customs to mark his grief over the passing of Kulfi. However, his shaving his hair also stands as his final symbolic rejection of the philosophies that had entangled him in this play of lies. It is interesting that Mrs Verma and Alu decide that *The Life of Pasteur* deserves a ‘funeral’ as well as they both struggle against the philosophical cage that had engulfed them. It is only in the literal burning of the book that they both find themselves absolved of the duties of taking it forward at the cost of losing their own selves. The ‘fierce gods’ of Balaram, ones who chase Alu halfway across the world, finally are put to rest through the most un-Reasonable of acts, the funeral pyre of institutionalised traditions that it had aimed to destroy.

COR ends on a note of introspection about the cyclic nature of all philosophies, the extremes that entrap the human belief in an unending saga of deferred desire for utopia. It questions the cleansing process that all philosophies postulate in order to gain the ultimate knowledge and concludes that the ultimate knowledge is nothing but a carrot dangled in front of the blinded follower as he rushes towards his own doom caught up in the frenzy of ideologies. In one of the most symbolic passages in the novel, *The Life of Pasteur* falls out of the bookshelf in Mrs Verma’s house and she asks Alu to read out the passage out of the page on which the book has opened itself. Alu reads, ‘It says that without the germ “life would become impossible because death would be incomplete”’. This sentence singularly captures the nihilistic nature of the philosophy of Reason that aims to eradicate all that stands as antagonistic to it and shows the failure of such scepticism. The bookcase, that ‘had all the order the world lacked’ the home of Reason, ironically rose into being those same terrifying and immovable gods that it had scoffed and questioned. Ghosh in the final moments of COR captures this terror through Mrs Verma, who succinctly diagnoses the failed state that Reason has built for her, her father as well as someone like Alu:

I can see that you love that book, Mr Bose, and that’s very sad, because you can love a book but a book can’t love you. That’s what I used to tell my father, but he could never understand. He would look at the world whirling around him and he would look at his books, and when they told him different stories, like a man caught between quarrelling friends, he wouldn’t know which side to take. But in the end, even if it meant shutting himself away, the books won. They ruled over him: for him that bookcase had all order the world lacked. I used to think it was love, but I know better

now. He was afraid; afraid of the power of science and those books of his; afraid that if he disowned them they would destroy him.⁶⁶

COR questions the state's power as well as need to confer statelessness on the figure of the migrant and the refugee, one that reiterates the bordered existence as essential to modern civilization. The refugee figure therefore becomes both the state's opposite as well as its one true expression of continuance of its ideologies.

The Shadow Lines

SL as a novel invests itself with the nuances of how spaces and places become symptomatic of one's relations with the self as well as the other. Spanning over three generations of protagonists, each of who are constantly struggling to create a fixed location for his or her viewpoint, SL is as much about real places as it is about imagined ones. Grounding the narrative through the eyes of the nameless, faceless narrator, Ghosh superimposes his reader and narrator on the same plane, thus, both detaching and attaching the reader onto the locus of the narrative. Ghosh ruptures the closed definitions of historicity and roots his story on a sense of ambiguity, ambiguity of place, face, time, language, an ambiguity which stands as a nemesis to History. SL unpacks history through the question of the multiple pasts, a multiplicity that negates the foundation of official Historical narrative where all pasts are singular in their formations and have the same impact on the present as well as the future. This multiplicity is hinted at the onset with the two broad divisions of the novel, *Going Away* and *Coming Home*; a play on the Bengali language where the same word denotes both the contrasting actions. 'Aschi', the Bengali word therefore, singularly captures the contesting pasts that are buried under the weight of the nation space and History, both of which shaped by an implicit science of violence, a violence to be used for 'the higher purposes of history through the instrumentalities of the modern nation state'⁶⁷. This analysis would read the narrative in two parts, firstly as a representation of the space politics that defines much of the postcolonial ethos and secondly, as a reading of alternate knowledge systems that question the arbitrary knowledge productions that form the base of historical and national politics. Following the critique that Nandy presents of the nation-state and its problematic relationship

⁶⁶ Ibid. p427.

⁶⁷ Ashis Nandy. 'History's Forgotten Doubles'. *The Romance of the State: And the Fate of Dissent in the Tropics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, p108. Print.

with nationalist history, what one wishes to question through SL is how to read rebel consciousness in a historically given situation where the entire documentation of that consciousness comes from the dominant narrative? How does one move away from historically identifying oneself with the self through the tropes of nation and its highest representative, the state? Is it possible to move away from the causal lineage and linkage that Hegelian History boasts of and untangle the individual from that causality? When history and belief of the dominant power become fused into each other, camouflaging itself under the 'legitimacy of history', at that point of crisis, what is the role that the narrator historian can play in order to demarcate the past from the hegemonic discourse of the dominant power structures? These questions underline the narrative structure of SL bringing into focus the problematic of the modern nation state and its hold over the third world countries, where a growing 'proportion of citizens is willing to tolerate that violence as a sacrifice they must make as patriotic citizens for future generations...sacrifices for the future of one's country and they invariably came from those who had less access to—or facility in—handling modern institutions'⁶⁸.

Going Away: Reading spaces as individuals at play

For some, the twentieth century has been the century of refugees. Others like Hannah Arendt have identified refugees as virtually a new species of human being who have come to symbolise the distinctive violence of our time. Refugees as contemporary symbols, however proclaim something more than a pathology of global nation-state system. They also represent a state of mind, a form of psychosocial displacement that has become endemic to modernizing societies.⁶⁹

SL traverses between the personal and the historical as even though it begins on a note of the personal yet it refuses to relegate itself completely into the realm of the familiar. This comes out through the subtle play on the nomenclature of Mayadebi and the narrator's refusal to address her with a name or term which expresses his familiarity: 'The truth is that I did not want to think of her as a relative: to have done that would have diminished her and her

⁶⁸ Ashis Nandy. 'The State: The Fate of a Concept'. *The Romance of the State: And the Fate of Dissent in the Tropics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp7-8. Print.

⁶⁹ Ashis Nandy. 'State. History and Exile in south Asian Politics: Modernity and the Landscape of Clandestine and Incommunicable Selves'. *The Romance of the State: And the Fate of Dissent in the Tropics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, p120. Print.

family—I could not bring myself to believe that their worth in my eyes could be reduced to something so arbitrary and unimportant as a blood relationship⁷⁰. This continuous defensive attempt to elevate the personal to the historical becomes the first criticism of the historical project: one that obliterates the everyday and the personal, turning them into footnotes, impersonal statistics in the grand narrative of historical progression. Furthering this critique of the universal unilateral progression of historical time, Ghosh's narrator from the beginning clarifies his role as one who embodies the shifting consciousness of the other characters; he begins with superimposing the visage of his eight year old self over his memory of stories heard about the eight year old Tridib and through it embark on a journey of multiple selves that flit from one timescape to the other, moving over continents, cities and houses, over gender and relationships in complete abandon of the accepted norms of archival work. Following Nandy's remark, 'In a civilization where there are many pasts, encompassing many bitter memories and animosities, to absolutize them with the help of the European concept of history is to attack the organizing principles of the civilization'⁷¹, the narrator produces multiple interpretations of same events weaving them with a synergy of perspectives which are complimentary yet contesting. Thus, while for Thamma Tridib becomes the repository of that rebellion that amounts to nothing but destruction, for the young narrator it is this romantic nihilism in Tridib's approach to life that allows him a perspective beyond the mundane of the everyday middle class lifestyle of his family. While the nameless narrator brings in Tridib's 'Gastric' as a reminder of the casual, Bengali middle class preoccupation with one's health as well as the incident of the narrator not being informed about his grandmother's death so that he can prepare for his finals, which brings the quirk of the Bengali bhadrolok for whom formal education is more solemn and important an affair than familial ties, he through the stories of Tridib's journeys into topographies, both physical and imagined peaks into the other side of the bhadrolok's consciousness—one that is quixotic, in search of a wanderlust that sparks his commonplace existence.

Space and place become two important dimensions for analysis of individual agency in Ghosh's narrative. To understand the nuanced reading of the two that Ghosh's narrator partakes through the course of the novel, it is imperative to first comprehend the difference between the two terminologies. As James Clifford points out, 'space is never ontologically

⁷⁰ Amitav Ghosh. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, (1988,1995) p.3. Print.

⁷¹ Ashis Nandy. 'History's Forgotten Doubles'. *The Romance of the State: And the Fate of Dissent in the Tropics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, p109. Print.

given. It is discursively mapped and corporeally practiced⁷². According to Clifford, space is composed through movement, produced through use, at the same time an agency and result of action or practice. Place is one on the other hand, that represents the pre-colonial construct of belonging in time, community and landscape; it is the concrete manifestation of the culture and community that provides its people with a distinctive mark of their own. It is this interplay between space and place that becomes the stage for the interpersonal, glocal relationships to play out at a time and age which is ripe with these questions of belonging and boundaries. Straddling among three countries, India, East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and Britain, Ghosh's narrator's space constructs are more than mere imaginative constructs of dotted lines on the atlas, they act out the territorial and political ideologies of the time, in a world precariously moving from the pre-modern status quo to the chaos of death of empires, births of independent colonies and the awakening of the new notion of the third world nation-scape. The static *place* with its isolated cultural hallmark gives in to the bedlam of *space* with its fluctuating loyalties, the changing arrangement of people, cultures, beliefs and ideas. 'Spatial practices work on a variety of levels in the novel such as telling stories and events, evoking the role of imaginary and real places across distant cultures and communities, watching fading photographs, reading maps and old newspapers, reminiscing about forgotten episodes of mutual bonding, and playing childhood games'⁷³. Each of these acts transcend the boundaries of place, instead creating a transcultural space that transgress the causal laws of time as it leaps over years, spaces and perspectives that lend itself to a vision of free space. Butt further remarks,

By spreading the story over diverse geographical and national landscapes in which memory and imagination reinvent historical reality, Ghosh highlights how the "shadows" of imaginary and remembered spaces haunt all characters in the novel as they struggle to narrate their personal and collective histories to each other. At the same time, these "shadows" in the form of "national boundaries" not only manipulate private and political spheres, but also demonstrate an individual's lifelong struggles to win over artificial borders, invading the space of home, territory, and motherland.(2)

⁷² James Clifford. *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997 p54. Web. 12.06.2015.

⁷³ Nadia Butt. 'Inventing or Recalling the Contact Zones? Transcultural Spaces in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*'. *Postcolonial Text*, Vol 4, No 3 2008, p4. PDF.

‘But how could you forget?’⁷⁴ is an epithet that forms the undercurrent of this memorial project that the narrator creates for Tridib, who becomes a victim to ethnic violence. The part of remembering in the historical project is seen as superior than its counterpart, forgetting. However, it is forgetting that allows History to create the unchallenged notions of past-truths, the wilful disremembering that injects apathy towards unearthing the buried memories under the grave marked statistics. This apathy is apparent in an Ila who superimposes her own imaginative versions of a causal history over her actual experiences of her life as the racial, gendered, historical other. The narrator’s angst at Ila’s memory lapse is also an anguish about History’s refusal to remember the personal in its obsession with the public, the grand narrative. Therefore, it is the narrator who has to unearth the curiosity of his eight year old self to take up the task of remembering the ones who have been forgotten; re-membering history with voices of ones like Tridib who lay beyond its scope of introspection and legitimacy.

The world that Ila perceives through her travels with her family, her documented memory of passports, and airport lounges, and the imaginative recreation of worlds that Tridib and the narrator indulge in represent the two stark forms of memory: History and its other. To Ila, the narrator’s fixation with the invented worlds of Tridib are farcical and sometimes even pity-inducing as she retorts time and again, ‘It’s you who were peculiar, sitting in that poky little flat in Calcutta, dreaming about faraway places. I probably did you no end of good; at least you learnt that those cities you saw on maps were real places, not like those fairylands Tridib made up for you’(23-4). The world that Ila inhabits is one which has been sanitised of its multiple layers by bureaucracy, best represented through the impersonal spaces of transfer—the airport lounges. For Ila and her mother, the world of their travels is an accumulation of the new, the impossible, to be perceived with wonder and to be seen as the goal to be achieved. This reveals itself in the masochistic relationship Ila shares with Nick Price, one which bases itself in an exploitation that is as much self-inflicted as it is enjoyed as the final price to be paid for belonging. Yet, even in the sterility of the airport lounges, in their self-same presentation of themselves, Ila invents her own set of peculiarities to tell them apart, to invest the personal in the public, as she demarcates them through the most ordinary yet indelibly linked with the private life marker—the toilets:

⁷⁴ Amitav Ghosh. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988,1995 p.9. Print.

I had a glimpse at that moment, of those names on the map as they appeared to her: a worldwide string of departure lounges, but not for that reason, at all similar, but on the contrary, each of them strikingly different, distinctively individual, each with its Ladies hidden away in some yet more unexpected corner of the hall, each with its own peculiarity...running around the airports to look for the Ladies, not because she wanted to go, but because those were the only fixed points in the shifting landscapes of her childhood. (20)

Tridib stands on the other extreme of this spectrum of travel, where his appreciation and comprehension of the world that resides in the dotted lines of the atlas are inventions which need to be continuously challenged and re-imagined. Freeing himself as well as the narrator from the straight-jacketed definitions of places and spaces which are often handed down as truths to be reconciled with, place for Tridib always transforms into a space of discoveries of new affinities, new stories as well as a reservoir of memories which are available only to those who know where to search for them. Travel therefore becomes a reconciliation of the past with the present to be remembered in retrospect. While for an Ila, a place bears importance only in the documented and accepted History that it can boast of and therefore for her, Calcutta is nothing more than a small place where nothing happens, Tridib's fascination with places acquaints the narrator with the multitudes of histories which remain undocumented and lost yet curiously intermingled with the present, waiting to be discovered. The places thus, invented through the search for these histories become dynamic entities that play as much a role in determining our individual trajectory as do one's actions. Thus, for the narrator, London becomes both a confidante and a reminder of his hopeless love for Ila, his companion in his search for a self that remained stagnated with the shroud of silence that begins with Tridib's death and finally a lover, that allows him to explore her in known and unknown ways as he tries to invent her in methods that would allow him to be free of 'other people's inventions'(31). Mockingly called 'a mystic from the east'(59) by Nick, the narrator's familiarity with the places of London, his inquisitiveness to find baubles from a history of a war that is only remembered in glories and not the lost generation in the roads, lanes and gardens of a suburbia that has been sanitised of all its memories and replaced with 'the old lady walking her Pekinese, the children who darted out of a house', is an obsession to transform the mutability of a place into the controlled trajectories of a space that he can capture in his mind map, much like the photographs of those times that Tridib had enticed him with; photographs that like an alien eye captured the moment in its most formalized self:

‘in the pictures of that time...people feel bound either to challenge the intrusion by striking postures of defiant hilarity, or else to compose their faces and straighten their shoulders, not always formally, but usually with just a hint of stiffness which is enough to suggest a public face’⁷⁵.

The narrator’s mind map even though cannot find the lost places of the past that he seeks, yet it becomes a strong reminder of the various roles a place plays in creating the ethos of a generation, one which is carried forward through stories, photographs and a number of intangible traces that helps in creating portals into the inaccessible personal worlds of the past. The cellar, where a nine year old Tridib sits and listens to the bombs, where the narrator realises the hopelessness of his pursuit of Ila as she sneaks into Nick’s room and when Ila confesses about the breakdown of her marriage to the narrator, becomes a vortex which collects these ghosts of memories and lines its walls for future explorers like the narrator to come and excavate them once more and release them into the future:

Those empty corners filled up with remembered forms, with the ghosts of the nine-year-old Tridib, sitting on the camp bed, just as I was, his small face intent, listening to the bombs; the ghost of Snipe in that far corner, near his medicine chest, worrying about his dentures; the ghost of the eight-year-old Ila, sitting with me under that vast table in Raibajar. They were all around me, we were together at last, not ghosts at all: the ghostliness was merely the absence of time and distance—for that is all that a ghost is, a presence displaced in time.⁷⁶

The real and the imaginative often blur their boundaries of being contained in time and converge onto a plane of the fantastical in the mindscape of the narrator. Time collapses and expands unlike the unidirectional nature of Historical time and in that movement of time, space is transformed into a vibrating and fluctuating entity that determines histories through its remembrance of it in the everyday, the mundane, the routine and yet one that disrupts the chain of causality. The story of the four friends living together in Brick Lane forms one such instance in the narrative where the ‘exhilaration in the air’ of the war lies complimentary to the domestic squabbles of the four friends, the easy nonchalance of their lives standing proud in the face of the bombed out reality of the war; their deaths though uninspiring and relegated into the oblivion of statistics stand dwarfed in the face of the life that they have already

⁷⁵ Ibid. p60.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p181.

imbued in the place, transforming it forever into a reservoir of the memories that would live on, if not in real spaces, then in the imagined spaces of the narrator's mind.

While the myriad histories contained in places liberates the narrator from the constricting visions of the pasts that History offers him, it is not the same for an Ila or Thamma. Thamma, clinging to her middle class dream of a nation and its promises, refuses to accept that the spaces for which they fought are nothing more than imaginations that have no place to commemorate all those aspects that people like her had given up in order to claim it as their own. Her dislike for a person like Ila who lives in between places comes from that innate sense of right that she thinks is necessary for a place to adopt you and see you as its own. This is a right which cannot be bought; it is one which demands sacrifice: 'Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood; with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they are a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood'⁷⁷. It is this idea of right that has often dominated postcolonial discussions, and formed the foundation for the zealous definitions of the right patriots and the wrong anti-nationals. The politics of space that the nation had promised had included not only a seamless sense of nationhood and unity in territory but also a sense of self-determination and power that would make these sacrifices worth something. It is the failure of History that Thamma loathes, a failure to deliver the promised land, to make the burden of the amputation less painful, to give a new kind of meaning that would causally link the past to the present's march towards a future glory. The imagined places in Thamma's middle class dream had failed her, 'a modern middle-class life, a small thing that history had denied her in its fullness and for which she could never forgive it'⁷⁸. It is this failure that makes Thamma wary of Tridib as he represents for all those transgressions that she had desired and had watched them fail, he is representative of all that she fears, the chaos that she had shielded herself from to hold on to her reconciliatory tales of the 'good life'; as the narrator succinctly remarks in the first few pages of the narrative, 'But even as a child I could tell she didn't pity him at all—she feared him'⁷⁹.

For Ila, places reaffirm the bondages that she wishes to transgress—those of race, gender and nations. Her desire to be free brings out the role spaces play in determining individual agency. From her alienation in school in her formative years in London to her embracing it as

⁷⁷ Ibid. p78.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p78.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p7.

a platform for her self-styled freedom, the city of London becomes her confidante witnessing her struggles for self-determination. While she plays houses with the narrator and fashions the domestic as her sphere of power, in reality it is the domestic that fails her in terms of allowing her a place to belong. Her failed marriage to Nick Price is almost cathartic to the narrator as it displays the failure of the self-sustained belief that one can belong only through rooting oneself with those who have the legitimised right of place through their colour, work or their lineage. Ila is her strongest in her refusal to be contained within fixed identities, in asserting her right to belong through her very unbelonging. She is the personification of that veranda that the eight year old narrator tells her as crucial to any house that they could build⁸⁰: that liminal space that flirts with the extremes of the outside and the inside, yet never submitting itself to either.

The first part of the narrative, 'Going Away' marks various deaths—the literal deaths of Thamma, the four friends and the metaphorical ones of Ila and the narrator as they move away from their childhood worlds. Going Away also symbolises the spaces that the characters inhabit and how each of them, let it be Mrs Price's house, the phantasmogorical bombed out streets and houses that the narrator searches for in Brick Lane and otherwise, become traces of a past that remains invisibly and indelibly present in each of the characters' futures. The literal going away cannot sever these connections. Thus, an Ila may choose a London over Calcutta for freedom, but she cannot outrun her reality of being an alien in her adopted space; the narrator might learn up every detail of the maps of England, yet understand, 'I know nothing at all about England except as an invention'⁸¹. Going Away marks an acceptance of the failure to control spaces to mirror certain pasts while forgetting the others. It establishes the breakdown of the myths that divides places into spaces of control, determining centres and peripheries; instead it reiterates the power imbued in places to determine futures, re-negotiate pasts. Nandy claims, 'History not only exhausts our idea of the past, it also defines our relationship with our past-selves. Those who own the past own the present...those who own the rights to shape the past of our selves can also claim part-ownership of our present selves'⁸²—it is this stranglehold of History that the space politics in Going Away aims at deconstructing and achieves success in as the past refuses to be owned and compartmentalised; it revels in its chaos.

⁸⁰ During their game of houses, Ila and the narrator get into an argument about how their house should be construed, an imagined house made from the dust that covered the floors of the cellar of the house in Raibajar.

⁸¹ Amitav Ghosh. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, (1988,1995) p.105. Print.

⁸² Ashis Nandy. 'History's Forgotten Doubles'. *The Romance of the State: And the Fate of Dissent in the Tropics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, p95. Print.

Coming Home: The Violence of Belonging

Ghosh in SL works around the nuances of the Bengali language through the names of the two parts of his narrative. Exploring the depths of a language to mean antithetical ideas through similar or same expressions, he and his narrator wish to push the boundaries of identity markers that often ground and restrict the individual into singular expressions of the self. While the first part of SL follows the borderless imaginative spaces of the narrator where the past, present and future often contract and expand into myriad experiences, the second half of the narrative focuses on the alternate of these freeing liminal spaces—the bounded worlds of nations, often at war with the consciousness of the characters. Beginning with a retrospective reading of the past, the world of the upside down house is brought into collision with the doomed love story of May and Tridib as they search for their happiness in a 'place without a past, without history, free, really free, two people coming together with the utter freedom of strangers'⁸³ as both the narrator and the reader realise the tragedy of space that is the hallmark of the twentieth century history.

Thamma's 'honeycomb' house becomes the first microscopic example of the macroscopic concepts of borders and spaces that the narrator struggles with in the novel. Built as a 'lop-sided pyramid'(121) the house with its myriad corners mirrored the confusion of the relationships that were housed in it. Headed by the septuagenarian grandfather, the two brothers and their families, the house reflected the ethos of a time where the boundaries of relationships defined the spaces they occupied. The death of the grandfather breaks the demarcated positions that each of the householders represent and the ensuing battle for primacy leads to what is one of the most potent symbols of the narrative, the upside-down house:

Everything is upside down there...at their meals they start with sweets and end with the dal, their books go backwards and end at the beginning, they sleep under their beds and eat on the sheets, they cook with jhatas and sweep with their ladles, they write with umbrellas and go walking with pencils...[but sometimes] we used to sit out there and gaze at that house. It seemed a better place to us then and we wished we could escape into it too.⁸⁴

⁸³ Amitav Ghosh. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988,1995 p.144. Print.

⁸⁴ Ibid. pp125-6.

The story of the upside-down house plays multiple roles within the narrative. Firstly, used as a ruse to amuse the young Maya-debi, the stories about the upside down house often reminds one of the world of the looking glass in *Alice in Wonderland* which in its very defiance of the norms of the Victorian society further heighten their importance. Similarly, the upside down house is important for Thamma and Mayadebi not merely to escape but to validate their own space as normative and agreeable. Secondly, the characters of the up-side down house especially in the example of the books which are read from the opposite end are indicative of the other language prevalent in East Pakistan and its effect on the two sisters: Urdu. Even though both Thamma and Maya-debi leave Dhaka before the partition and the ensuing Bengali Language Movement, however the way language acts as a marker of identity and belonging runs through their remembrance of Dhaka and continues as they try to come to terms with the new Dhaka that meets them when they finally go back. The Bengali Language and its specific intonations become the only remnant of the personal histories that have been buried under the weight of official amnesia. While tangentially mentioning the inverted script of the Urdu language in one of her stories about the upside-down house, it is almost a premonition to the Muslim families that would later encroach upon it and would be its sole care-takers. The story of the upside-down house serve as an omen to the upheaval of narratives that space would demand out of the familiar places in the name of nations and its legitimised History.

The bedlam of spatial identities is acted out through Thamma's confusion with the meaning of nation and what it entails. For Thamma, one who had been enchanted by the struggle for rightful place, nationalism is not merely the imagined community that works together; it is a clearly demarcated space which lies in absolute tandem with the identity that it confers upon its citizens. The borders that mark these spaces therefore need to be tangible ones, drawn to sever through the years of shared histories and memories and form absolute non-overlapping identities. This is shared through the History thus written, 'one of the most important ways in which we learn to identify ourselves with the nation and its highest representative, the state'⁸⁵. It is this identification which confounds Thamma as her citizenship lies at odds with her birthplace. Her refusal as well as anger towards the lack of sterilised identities is also her disappointment at the grand narrative of History that had promised an invented nation of achieved and achievable possibilities. Her angst captured through her confusion, 'What was it

⁸⁵ Dipesh Chakravarty. 'History as Critique and Critique(s) of History'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26 No. 37 (September, 1991), p2164. Web. 12.07.2015

all for then—partition and all the killing and everything—if there isn't something in between?'⁸⁶ is a question that plagues the world of shadow lines and borders, ones which are ironically internalised rather than expressed through physical manifestations, much like the wall that separated the upside-down house from that of Thamma's house; 'it had become a part of them' (124). Thamma's disappointment at Dhaka stems from this same sense of despair for the lost promises of history. With the re-writing of Dhaka as a place, even her memory of it has to be now refurbished and rewritten. It is this lack of concrete definitions which make the liminal spaces even more important in understanding the politics of space within the subcontinent. Much like the veranda in the make-believe game of the narrator and Ila in the cellars of Raibajar, the airport lounges serve as the new spaces of transgressive border spaces within the new narrative of the nation: 'This is the modern world. This border isn't on the frontier: it's right inside the airport. You will see. You'll cross it when you have to fill in all those disembarkation cards and things'. This is ironically the vindication of Ila's way of perceiving the world, in the sterilised compartments of the airport lounges away from the lived reality of places; a Tridib therefore needs to sacrifice himself at the altar of such knowledge systems in order for the alternate narratives of knowledge to arise from oblivion and claim their share in remembered history. Hence the narrator's reiteration on the need to recollect, to speak, to listen, to defeat the 'silence of an absolute, impenetrable banality'.

...the past shapes the present and the future, but the present and the future also shape the past. Some scholars feel responsible enough to the present to subvert the future by correcting the past; others are as willing to redefine, perhaps even transfigure the past to open up the future. The choice is not cognitive, but moral and political, in the best sense of the terms.⁸⁷

Tridib's death marks the space that exists between History and the myriad histories that constantly demand from the future a cognition that had been denied to them. Nandy's statement about the moral and political connotations that lay inherent in reassessing pasts through the lens of the present as well as the future is a question of ethics that forms the basis of Ghosh's argument about ways of deciphering the trauma of divisive spaces. Tridib's death has been called a number of things in the narrative—'an accident' 'a real sacrifice', a statistic lost in the footnotes of the metanarrative of public history and a silence that is impenetrable

⁸⁶ Amitav Ghosh. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988,1995 p.151. Print.

⁸⁷ Ashis Nandy. 'History's Forgotten Doubles'. *The Romance of the State: And the Fate of Dissent in the Tropics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003, p109. Print.

except through imperfect and banal words. His death is a struggle that the narrator is ‘destined to lose... already lost’⁸⁸ as it is a gap, ‘a hole, an emptiness in which there are no words’(218). The violence that marks the breakdown of place into space lies enshrouded within that silence that stands as a shadow falling on the monolithic shrines of words speaking belonging and awarding rights. Nandy in his ‘History’s Forgotten Doubles’ remarks that the only time one can free oneself from the clutches of this outpouring of History’s words is in moments of extreme joy or tragedy. It is only then that the stranglehold that History has over citizens is loosened over the whirlpool of silence that sucks in all definitions of belonging. The specifics of Tridib’s death are stated through the imperfect and broken memories of three characters—Robi, May and the hysterics of Thamma. The underlying struggle with silence that the narrator faces in each of these narratives is the struggle of memory against trauma. Yet the narrator’s refusal to let go, ‘I was determined now that I would not let my past vanish without trace; I was determined to persuade them of its importance’ is his positioning the micro-histories against the onslaught of the regularised and normative History. The story of the riot lost in the macrocosm of the nation’s narrative can be only brought into speech through the metanarrative of the incidents in Kashmir. The memory of the riot does not only stand as a key to the greater mystery of Tridib’s death but more as a testimony of the refusal of spaces to be controlled within the contours of familiarity. The story of the riot as experienced by the young narrator and its mirror image in Dhaka that results in Tridib’s death testifies to the chameleonic nature that allows places to transform themselves into hostile spaces, ones that destroy those very markers that make it recognizable. Ghosh’s narrator articulates this fear poignantly,

That particular fear has a texture you can neither forget nor describe. It is like the fear of the victims of an earthquake, of people who have lost faith in the stillness of the earth. And yet it is not the same. It is without analogy, for it is not comparable to the fear of nature, which is the most universal of human fears, nor to the fear of the violence of state, which is the commonest of modern fears. It is a fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can become, suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world—not language, not food, not music—it is the special quality

⁸⁸ Amitav Ghosh. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988,1995 p.218. Print.

of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror.⁸⁹

Space which works as an active constitutive component of hegemonic powers, enters into a struggle with 'place' which is the locus of social identity and fixing social relations into a fixed conglomeration that defies all physical demarcations that boundaries of space imply and put into use. The story of the riot proves this conjecture: taking germ from the faded memories of the narrator and his zeal to prove its veracity, moving into the inconsequential newspaper stories that soon forgets it in their zeal to look for better stories of nation-building that do not scar the hegemonic dominant narratives, the riot finds its final place in the imaginary circles that the narrator draws in the dilapidated Bartholomew's Atlas that Tridib had gifted him. Even though the riots had 'disappeared from the collective imagination of "responsible opinion"', vanished, without leaving a trace in the histories and bookshelves, dropped out of memory into the crater of a volcano of silence⁹⁰ they remain engraved in that silence which acts as the fourth dimension of space, ready to reveal itself to the future in moments of absolute freedom from the burden of history—like that of Tridib's death. The circle that the narrator draws, bringing together disparate places into a conglomeration of spatial affinities, dispels the myths of space politics which states that proximity determines spatial structures and their effects on each other. Thus, 'learning the meaning of distance' (212) the narrator realises that even though spatially a Thailand lies closer to Calcutta than a Kashmir, yet Kashmir plays a bigger role in determining the spatial and political upheavals of Calcutta than Thailand. The borders which are meant to work as transitional spaces between the local and the foreign, fail in creating clear divisions of priorities. 'One could say then, that the "local" is not really about a specific intrinsic territory but about the construction of bundles or clusters of identities in and through the cultures of transnational capitalism'⁹¹. Therefore, Dhaka and Tridib, becomes misnomers of history, to be forgotten like a shameful secret that would otherwise destroy the imaginary affinities that borders and the modern nation state is supposed to create. The construction of temporalized narratives of identity through new histories, rediscovered genealogies, imagined borders all stand defeated in the wake of histories that continuously threaten their notions of inclusion and exclusion—the 'place' engulfing the narrowing contours of 'space':

⁸⁹ Amitav Ghosh. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988,1995 p.204. Print.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p230.

⁹¹ Caren Kaplan. 'Postmodern Geographies'. *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, pp159-60. PDF

They had drawn their borders, believing in that pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map... What had they felt, I wondered, when they discovered that they had created not a separation, but a yet undiscovered irony—the irony that killed Tridib: the simple fact that there had never been a moment in the four-thousand-year-old history of that map, when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines—so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free—our looking-glass border.⁹²

Coming Home delves into the violence that lay intrinsic is deciphering one's relationship with the place one inhabits. With the narrative of globalisation where the movement of people is seen as a fundamental part of the new world space, borders and boundaries bring forth the irony that lies embedded in such causal structures of History. While the territorial characteristic of the socio-political organisation of the nation-state is extremely visible, it fails to take into accounts the humanistic side of this organisation. Unlike pre-modern societies where territories were marked based on social difference, modern nation-states carve out their spaces based on territorial structures, overlooking the social aspects. Dividing the spaces where 'there were only states and citizens; there were no people at all' (233), the modern territorial state often draws lines of difference and boundaries ignoring human relations and expecting the boundaries to act as opaque points of difference that would give the modern-state its characteristics. However, the mental maps of places remain far more engraved within the consciousness of the people than the official ones and this creates an everlasting tension between the basic tenets of the 'imagined community' of the nation state and the reality of the shared experiences of the place that had undergone a brutal amputation. These borderlands therefore become test-sites for the health of the nation-state politic, complicating the relationship between national territory and national identity which in the subcontinent many a times lay at loggerheads with each other⁹³. Coming Home engages with the ambiguous nature of borders and the spaces they inhabit within official history—a history

⁹² Amitav Ghosh. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988,1995 p.233. Print.

⁹³ Hastings Donnan and Thomas M Wilson delve into the nature of borderlands and their characteristics in detail in their *Borderlands: Ethnographic Approaches to Security, Power, and Identity*.

that fears such ambiguity. Just like the two sides of the upside-down house and the wall that separated it, *Coming Home* meditates on borders which theoretically act as impermeable doors gating the nation-space and securing it from external threats, serving as a physical manifestation of the power and durability of the nation, while practically, especially in the chaos of shared history in the subcontinent, acting as arbitrary lines that expose the deep relationships embedded in the impenetrable silence of buried personal histories. SL is a re-affirming of these buried voices, freed finally from the clutches of normative History—the surge of *Antistory* in that brief moment of rupture: the ‘final redemptive mystery’⁹⁴ that is Tridib’s death.

Conclusion

The homeland is not waiting back there for the new ethnics to rediscover it. There is a past to be learned about, but the past is now seen, and it has to be grasped as a history, as something that has to be told. It is narrated. It is grasped through memory. It is grasped through desire. It is grasped through reconstruction. It is not just a fact that has been waiting to ground our identities.⁹⁵

Ghosh in COR and SL constantly question the mental structure of the homeland that becomes the point of salvation for almost all hybrid literature. Realising that the homeland in its entirety will never be an acquired truth, the characters often through the tropes of nostalgic recalling, reiteration and narrative reconstruction ground themselves with it. It is through this constant retelling and reaffirming of the shadows of the desired space that the figure of the disenfranchised, the refugee can answer back to the historically edified spatial politic which had over centuries considered their voices as silent and pushed them into nothingness. The voice of the refugee figure let it be Alu or Kulfi constructing their own identities through their narration or Thamma whose constant story-telling to the young narrator makes him sensitive to the politics of acquired space, each of these instances ground the power of the refugee outsider to claim his/her position as a legitimate producer of historically critical discourses—discourses that refuse to be bracketed within the impersonal compartments of statistics or universal knowledge.

⁹⁴ Amitav Ghosh. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, (1988,1995) p.252. Print.

⁹⁵ Stuart Hall. ‘The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity’. In *Culture, Globalization and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony D. King, London: Macmillan, 1991, p38.

Beginning with hybrid as a dominant and normative form of articulation in postcolonial narratives, Ghosh in *COR* and *SL* tries to delve into new ways of representing the unsaid. Using time as an entity that is no longer linear and causal rather can be contracted, expanded and travelled on, Ghosh sketches characters that are in constant process of becoming rather than having already become. While in *COR* Alu and Jyoti Das complement and contrast each other in this process of evolving, *SL* consists of characters who are at war with their very position as the notional hybrid. Taking in their testimonies as stepping stones to delve into the abyss of silence that had been guarded by official narratives, Ghosh is careful in moulding these into the ahistorical project, one that lies beyond the historicity of modern social and political structures. Ghosh in both his narratives clearly explores how History in its very modern form is not the anthropology of past times and his ahistorical project aims at rectifying that through an understanding of the smaller nuances of lived experiences while considering the grand metanarratives with suspicion. The main tool that he uses in this redefinition is to realise that the most damaging act that one can indulge in with the past is to re-appropriate it to locate their utopias in that past, narrowing the scope of that past into envisionable and acceptable alternatives. Every time any character in the two texts has fallen into this trap, Thamma in her obsession with the right to the nation, Balaram in his mania for a scientific cleansing of histories to reach the past utopia of triumph of Reason, it had led to their doom. The violence intrinsic in such fixated ways of visualising the past had resulted in tragic ends, ones which have continued to claim its price over generations.

Countering the imperialist nostalgia that remains embedded in all nationalist discourses, Ghosh in *COR* and *SL* envisages alternate communities that can stand as parallel to the homogenised universalizing of the nation-state project. Increasingly concerned about the hegemonic cultural and social practices that are disseminated by ideas of nationalism and universal belonging, Ghosh in *COR* and *SL* envisages communities that remain ahistorical, forming their selves through myths, legends and other transcendental theories of the past. The Ras or the imagined spaces of Tridib's stories which are handed down to the narrator, each of these substitute the official narratives of History. However, Ghosh is apprehensive about their efficacy in countering normative structures without themselves transforming into those as in both the novels the alternate structures either fail or are dismantled as they cannot refrain from adapting those very characteristics which they had aimed to counter (this is true in the case of the Ras whose destruction is the only possible alternative to counter its growing hegemonic hold over the people who created it).

‘A whole history remains to be written about spaces—which would be at the same time be the history of powers’⁹⁶. COR and SL examine how space politics become the mainstay of economic, social and cultural powers within the subcontinent. The concept of location in both these texts offer an alternate vision to the universalizing gestures of masculine thought, investing into liminal spaces which lay as the points of power generation. Spaces in Ghosh’s texts are active constitutive components of hegemonic powers. Questioning the modern concept of the space as an immovable and static entity compared to the fluidity of time, COR and SL both invest in understanding the nuances that transforms a non-reactive ‘place’ into a fluctuating and ever-changing ‘space’ which allows reclaiming of histories which have been buried in time. If seen through the lens of spaces, the whole course of SL’s narrative can be charted into specific topographies and their power over the individual caught up in a tussle with it. The old table in Raibajar, the cellar at Mrs Price’s house, the imagined bombed out streets of London, the three cities of Dhaka, Calcutta and London are all equal stakeholders in the creation of the myriad personal stories and histories that are unearthed through the novel. The spaces contain and construe the stories; the narrator is merely a listener documenting it.

Do SL and COR succeed in thinking beyond the universalizing gestures of the masculine project of nation-building and re-articulate marginality in novel terms? It is a question which has no easy and straight answers. While in certain sections, Ghosh’s narrators deconstruct the politics of space prevalent in the nation-building myths and expose its imperialistic, exploitative and homogenous structures, they at multiple points also fall into those same problems of definitions and organisations of power that they dismantle. This is especially felt through the women in the narratives, an analysis of which is made in a later chapter, *Unravelling the Traces*. However, that cannot take the triumph of SL and COR as they ground the *antistories* of travel, migration and belonging, ushering in new directions in exploring the multiple and disparate pasts that make the mosaic of the subcontinent.

⁹⁶ Michel Foucault. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980 p149. PDF.

Chapter 3

Countering History, Breaking through Memory: Documenting the 'Antistory' and its challenges in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace* & *The Hungry Tide*

'Do you think everything that can be known, should be known?' (The Calcutta
Chromosome)⁹⁷

'already known by instinct

we're not comfortably at home

in our translated world' (The Hungry Tide)⁹⁸

'It was a personal duty: any writer worth his salt has to tackle morality, particularly the
morality of history' (Amitav Ghosh)⁹⁹

The three quotes that begin the chapter even though spoken in completely different contexts within the first two novels and the last in an interview about the third novel, yet bring forth the basic struggle that forms the point of discussion in this chapter: what can be known? What is the extent of that knowing? And finally, can all knowledge be inscribed within the same rubric of knowable and unchangeable counter-history, one that will challenge the norms of official History and its narrative? In the first chapter of this thesis, one of the first

⁹⁷ Amitav Ghosh. *The Calcutta Chromosome: a novel of fevers, delirium & discovery*. New Delhi: Penguin India 1996,2008, p 52. Print.

⁹⁸ Amitav Ghosh. *The Hungry Tide*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers 2004 p.206. Print.

⁹⁹ Amitav Ghosh. 'Coming Under Burmese Fire Was Surreal'. Interview. *Outlook Magazine*. (July 2000). Accessed on 2016. <http://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/coming-under-burmese-fire-was-surreal/209696>. Web.

questions that have been discussed is how we perceive History in the postcolonial context, and how through various ways that static History has tried to represent itself as the normative and the singular means of understanding the past. In reference to that, two antithetical means of creating that History were identified, namely, the colonial approach and the later nationalist approach. While the dissimilarities of both these approaches presented the two sides of the spectrum of representation of the colonized past, they also converge into each other in their use of pictorial representation as a legitimation of their claims: the contested and often problematic map. While Ghosh in his SL often refers to maps as both debilitating as well as looking glasses which often reflect the clone-like nature of all those that it divides, the question of the map morphs itself into an agenda that he visits through different means in his next three novels, namely, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (hitherto referred to as CC), *The Glass Palace* (hitherto referred to as GP) and *The Hungry Tide* (hitherto referred to as HT). While the map and its borders may not become part of the storyline as overtly as it had in SL, it does act as a subterranean force that determines the overarching philosophy that Ghosh proposes in these three novels. This is firstly and most tellingly felt through the important position that places and their boundaries play in the dissemination of the story-lines: CC finds its point of germination in the elusive Calcutta Chromosome that each of the characters are chasing in the novel; Burma and its various cities stand at the precipice of destruction at the beginning of GP and as the narrator follows each of the characters to their destinies, he realises how intrinsically the place they inhabit dominates their decisions and choices; HT illuminates the quixotic nature of the Sunderbans and how it moulds each of the characters' understanding of their own histories. This is further emphasized through the means that cartography uses to examine the social structure referenced in these texts. 'Maps in ignoring altogether the reason for their own genesis, gloss over both past and present oppressions, silencing marginalised populations and their often politically inconvenient counter-narratives'¹⁰⁰, a feature which is examined and questioned time and again in these three novels. Ghosh realises how cartography can embody a systematic social inequality where, 'distinctions of class and power are engineered, reified and legitimated in the map'¹⁰¹ and it is this legitimation that he wishes to deconstruct through counter-stories that does not only question History but also memory. Unravelling the time space nexus that forms the

¹⁰⁰ J. Edward Mallot. " 'A Special Enchantment in Lines': The Maps of Memory". *Memory, Nationalism, and Narrative in Contemporary South Asia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 p-182. Print.

¹⁰¹ J. B Harley. 'Deconstructing the Map' *Cartographica* 16.2 (1989), p-7. Mentioned in J. Edward Mallot. " 'A Special Enchantment in Lines': The Maps of Memory". *Memory, Nationalism, and Narrative in Contemporary South Asia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 p-183. Print.

foundation of History's movement towards a predestined goal, each of these novels invest themselves in questioning the causality that is often taken as a price to be paid by the past for a future that will glorify that sacrifice. Ghosh's characters are often suspicious of official justifications of either a present or a past, one that often shields the actual myopic political motifs of greed, exploitation and destruction. As Dinu's wife, Daw Thin Thin Aye succinctly remarks, 'To use the past to justify the present is bad enough—but it's just as bad to use the present to justify the past'¹⁰².

All the three novels carry within them the anxiety and urgency of knowing that they bear testimony to those arenas of the past which are in danger of not only being forgotten but their very act of being forgotten as forgotten. Much like Chretien's idea of the radical forgetting, where the past is always already in danger of being obviated through a forgetting that is not memory but its other, a dark void of absolute oblivion, each of these texts narrate a saga which remain curiously deleted from the archives and with the death of the survivors, removed from all vestiges of memory itself. They carry within them the 'messianic power' that Benjamin speaks of, one that illuminates itself in moments of danger of obliteration, of not remembering. Ghosh explains this further in an interview about GP and the Forgotten Long March that lies at the heart of the narrative,

It's not been written about at all!...It's strange—there were over half a million people on the Long March, over 400,000 of them Indian, and there is such a silence about it. It illustrates the degree to which we-re truly oblivious about our own history.¹⁰³

Ghosh's narrators in all the three texts realise that when histories are in the danger of becoming impossible, that's when remembering sets in: thus, AVA suddenly unearths Murugan's identity card that sends Antar into a proverbial rabbit-hole of memories; Nirmal's diary suddenly resurfaces after having been lost just in time for Kanai to read it while Piya explores the fauna of the Sunderbans and he can help her in putting together the histories, wadding through the silence that pervades the forests; the author-narrator and his mother Jaya sieve through the disparate bundle of papers that Uma leaves behind after her death to put together a history of not only their family but also the millions of others who have been edited out of the pages of official narratives.

¹⁰² Amitav Ghosh. *The Glass Palace*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2000 p-537. Print.

¹⁰³ Amitav Ghosh. 'Coming Under Burmese Fire Was Surreal'. Interview. *Outlook Magazine*. (July 2000). Accessed on 2016. <http://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/coming-under-burmese-fire-was-surreal/209696>. Web.

In this chapter, we are going to approach the three said novels from three pertinent points which determine their efficacy as counter-narratives to the official act of history-writing. Firstly, to delve into the nature of the remembered narratives, it is imperative to understand and reflect upon the fact that, just like history, memory also is not free from prejudice; memory becomes another centre of propaganda, both personal and official. In reality, the relationship between memory and history is more complex and perhaps even more symbiotic to each other; each just as invented, just as suspicious, just as motivated as the other. The ‘corrective’ accounts of the survivors and the fringe peripheral elements are supposed to always already glorify a suffering that would act as an adhesive to the fragmentary nature of identity politics and through it explore new ways of understanding the self and the other. In a quest for these ‘corrective’ accounts what often amount to are an exaggeration and a post-mortem correction of memories to fit into the mould of the counter-narrative. ‘There are so many sources of it that it is hard to identify the marginal from the crucial, the transitory from the longlasting, and difficult somehow to put together the very disparate impulses symbolised by Oprah Winfrey and Primo Levi. The superficial and the profound coexist in our obsession with memory’¹⁰⁴. In an age of excess of memory which is paradoxically linked with also a silence that engulfs memories, the question that haunts all narratives that wish to transgress the lines of authorised narratives, is how much memory should be ethically and reasonably be allowed? As Mallot further dissects this question, the secondary questions that come into being includes, ‘What kinds of witnessing should be discounted, and by what authority? If we accept some testimony but refuse others, how do we excuse what inevitably becomes a new form of marginalization and silencing? If “truth” is the standard by which memories are judged, how do we know what’s true?’¹⁰⁵ These become the first set of lenses through which we read Ghosh’s CC, GP and HT and the endeavour should be to understand how do memories work in the performance of realities, who has the authority to remember and most importantly, what should be remembered and what purpose does it serve? As we move into the textual analysis of the three texts based on this line of questioning, we would see that all of the narratives represent a constant struggle with these concepts and sometimes, as in the case of GP, fail to come through with an adequate answer and instead falls into the same traps that it had started with the notion of critiquing.

¹⁰⁴ Jay Winter. ‘Notes on the Memory Boom: War, Remembrance and the Uses of the Past’. *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship between Past & Present*. Ed. Duncan Bell. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006 p-55. PDF

¹⁰⁵ J. Edward Mallot. ‘Introduction’. *Memory, Nationalism, and Narrative in Contemporary South Asia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 p-7. Print.

‘Nobody knows, nobody can ever know, not even in memory, because there are moments in time that are not knowable’¹⁰⁶—the second point of analysis that this chapter would take up is the question of the unknowable. While all the three narratives aim at representing the unrepresentable, voiceless and the muted, through the avenues of what I term as the *antistory*, how does one demonstrate counter-narratives which are not open to the processes of memory and normative historical verifiability? In the continuous act of disappearance of the trace, how does one explore the contours of the unknowable, the immemorial; standing beyond the horizons of remembered memory? Does remembering in this case become an act of paradox as we are ‘saved and destroyed at the same time’¹⁰⁷? While the overall philosophy that Ghosh through his narrators and protagonists seem to be extolling is that of remembering as an act of redemption, yet many of his characters as well as the places that they are situated in show reluctance in giving themselves into the remembrance project. While remembering corrects the past, it also often makes the past vulnerable to the politics of the present. Therefore characters like Nilima in HT, Rajkumar in GP and various others refuse to be part of the re-politicizing of the past through remembering and instead take refuge in forgetting—a forgetting that feeds on the paradox that the more one forgets the more one remembers. The chapter explores how the three narratives steer themselves in interesting ways as they begin at the point of expression which forms the threshold between the knowable and the unknowable: CC expresses itself as an experiment into alternate narratives which draw their succour from the heart of normative postcolonial history—the colonial narrative of progress; GP throughout the course of its narrative through the trope of ahistorical coincidence underscores historical facts to create other forms of storytelling; HT unravels itself through the terrain of Sunderbans as its protagonist—a place that makes itself known as the ahistorical immemorial which refuses to be contained in normative forms of archiving.

The third problematic that will be investigated into in this chapter is the position of the postcolonial ‘I’ in all the three narratives and whether as well as how they mould themselves to the call of an ahistorical *antistory*. ‘The major difference between those living in history and those living outside it, especially in societies where myths are the predominant mode of organizing experiences of the past, is what I have called the principle of principled

¹⁰⁶ Amitav Ghosh. *The Shadow Lines*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988,1995 pp.66-7. Print.

¹⁰⁷ Maja Zehfuss. ‘Remembering to Forget/ Forgetting to Remember’. *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship between Past & Present*. Ed. Duncan Bell. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006 p213. PDF

forgetfulness'¹⁰⁸—this principled forgetfulness plays the catalyst in breaking down and re-configuring the postcolonial selves of the narrators. Positioning the ahistorical circumstances and events against the historical 'I' of the narrator, Ghosh wishes to examine the extent to which the historical 'I' of the self is amenable to the forces of the ahistorical, which remains as a dissenting minority in the face of the onslaught of archival official History. The three narratorial figures in his novels—Antar, Kanai and the absent-present narrator great grandson, each of them struggle with their existing knowledge of the postcolonial self and the antithetical forces that threaten to disassemble that self. The questions that reiterates for all the three is whether that disassembling is a successful one or whether it falls into the same pitfalls that form the hallmark of normative postcolonial storied self? What are the moral and ethical connotations of such disentanglement? Can the ahistorical be inscribed into the forms of the historical which remains as the one possible way to disbursing to the multitudes or can other forms of archiving be formulated to match the new avenues of knowledge? Finally, can the chasm between the historian and the ahistorical be covered through the authorial 'I'?

The Calcutta Chromosome

CC while reading like a detective/ thriller novel, divides its story into two sections, the day of the Mosquito and the Day After. While on first glance it might seem like a simplistic timeline, however, within the scope of these two days there are three different timelines which are all intrinsically fused in with each other. These three parallel stories work simultaneously at the beginning of the narrative—two embodying two different pasts and one in the narrative present. Yet, they are all converging into a nucleus that carried within itself multiple other stories, each of which becomes catalysts in the final unravelling of the mystery. Ghosh employs various cinematic tropes like flashbacks, story within story and dramatic coincidences which all work towards the realisation of the final subversion.

While the fulcrum of the narrative is based on Murugan's obsession in finding out the true nature of the discovery of the malaria parasite and his need to transfer that knowledge onto each character that comes in contact with him, it also exposes myriad answers to questions of

¹⁰⁸ Ashis Nandy. 'History's Forgotten Doubles'. *The Romance of the State And the Fate of Dissent in the Tropics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003 p 86. Print.

space-time nexus, multiplicity of truths and the idea of a consciousness which can transfer itself over space and time. The plotline of the narrative follows an Antar who spends his days cooped up in his office- cum- home with the supercomputer AVA as they sieve through different information as part of his job in the International Water Council. Devoid of human conversations, his days are spent in listening to AVA churn out variations of information about the world and reading through the automated practice of reflecting the texts onto a screen. The mechanization of the reading process as well as the refusal of AVA to grant Antar even a few moments to read on his own while ironically constantly hounding him to better itself by processing in more information, is the narrator's representation of an almost apocalyptic city-space where capitalist utilitarian world structure thrives on machine like efficiency. Yet, the struggle for man and his individuality continues in this make-believe dystopic future as Antar undercuts this impersonal world by even naming his computer and ascribing to it personal traits like that of an errant child. The world that Antar occupies has moved from being community-oriented buildings to commercial depots lacking human settlement. The motley group of friends that Antar makes at the tea-shop all represent a kind of melancholy that reflects onto the bleakness of the realm that they reside in. This is a domain where language works as both a trigger to memory as well as infects those memories with a sense of claustrophobia reminiscing of space, time and an excess of familiarity that each of the characters in this dystopia are trying to outrun. However, the archiving process and the triumphant narrative of History continues even in this deadened space, with a force which often resorts to ideological violence in order to create the narrative of exultant glory, were even the debris are imbued with significance: 'they saw themselves making History with their vast water-control experiments: they wanted to record every minute detail of what they had done, what they would do...they wanted to load their dirt with their own meaning'¹⁰⁹. It is interesting that this History-archive project of ascribing value to every moment and minute detail is controlled by a board that deals with water experiments, the control of which often leads to being the breeding point of the mosquito which forms the heart of the narrative.

Ghosh's narrative plays around with two monuments of archival History—the normative and the alternate. While the normative becomes an entry point into a Victorian colonial past represented through Ronald Ross, the alternate acts as a shadow narrative that undercuts the

¹⁰⁹ Amitav Ghosh. *The Calcutta Chromosome: a novel of fevers, delirium & discovery*. New Delhi: Penguin India 1996,2008, p 6. Print.

normative through time and space. The normative is a linear story of triumph which simplistically put is this: Ronald Ross, part of the Indian Medical Service of the Empire comes to Calcutta to discover the antecedents of the malarial parasite. He is successful in examining certain patients bearing the malarial parasite and with the help of his able servant/compounder he discovers the parasite that causes malaria, thus not only opening up medical research for this dreaded disease from the colonies but also in furthering the cause of the Empire as the most successful and humanistic endeavour of the British power structure. This discovery confers upon him a knighthood from the British monarchy as well as a permanent position within the colonial narrative of progress and human victory over the ravages of the spaces of the colonies which they had aimed to civilize. To further authenticate as well as immortalise his legacy in the Empire, Ross also maintains a diary that works as an accessory to his history-making endeavours: ‘the great thing about a guy like Ronald Ross is that he writes everything down. You’ve got to remember: this guy’s decided he’s going to re-write the history books. He wants everyone to know the story like he’s going to tell it; he’s not about to leave any of it up for grabs, not a single minute if he can help it’¹¹⁰.

On the other side of this documentation of official memory narrative lays Murugan. Ghosh at the outset clues in his readers to the fact that Murugan in his very nature would embody the multiplicity of meanings that he would be in search of for the rest of the novel: he gives Murugan two names. Murugan’s name is often mutated into Morgan by many of the characters in the novel as they cannot pronounce his name. This presents one of the first cases of colonisation and the power-politics associated with it, as changing of names into more Anglophonic ones has been one of the first ways of colonizing the mind-space of the colonized. However unlike the complete annihilation of the other name, Murugan clings on to both his avatars—the slightly eccentric Murugan in search of mysteries which seem improbable and the respectable Morgan who works for Life Watch—creating fragments within his own self, mirroring the fragmented and buried histories that he aims to uncover. Murugan’s interest in re-interpreting the malarial discovery initially takes him to the threshold of normative history that Ross represents, one that brands him eccentric and rebukes his theories about alternate histories. However, it is interesting that within the normative lay the portal to the silenced world of the subaltern histories: thus, while a Lutchman cannot write his story forward, Ross in his obsession to document every part of the discovery process unwittingly peppers his records with the shadow figures of the ‘Other’.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p46.

This is the Other Mind that becomes Murugan's initial clue to pursue to unearth the bigger mystery even at the risk of social ouster: 'It was at about this time that he began to speak openly about his notion of the so-called 'Other Mind': a theory that some person or persons had systematically interfered with Ronald Ross's experiments to push malaria research in certain directions while leading it away from others' (33).

Examining the silent side of History, Ghosh's Murugan explores the memories which remain buried in diaries, journals, personal remembrances and nightmares. There are three journals which form the base of Murugan's story: Ross's, J W D Gregson's and Elijah Monroe Farley's. The journal or the personal diary has always worked as an alternate form of the archiving project, one that mingles the private with the public, creating narratives of subversion. As stated earlier, while Ross's journal is aimed at recording his movement towards the glorious pages of inscribed historical memory, it unwittingly also becomes a gateway to the other versions of histories (*antistories*) whose very act of forgetting has been forgotten. In all the three journals and the personal letters of Farley, the subaltern slowly grows from being a shadowy figure hidden somewhere in the backdrop (in Ross) to becoming a prominent force that channels and changes the nature of the documentation as in Farley's. It is in Farley's documents that Ghosh first introduces the mysterious figure of Mangala who would later claim the space of being as immortal as the science that she both reveres and rebukes. Ghosh presents Mangala as a subaltern through the eyes of his colonial character, Farley, yet he is also quick to destabilise the comfort the colonizer is used to feeling at the presumed lower intelligence of the native through a sense of foreboding that Farley feels as he eavesdrops into the heated discussion between Mangala and Lutchman: 'Yet he could find no name for what it was that faced him and why he feared it, And this in turn became his very fear, that he could not name what he knew he must confront'(128). This sense of foreboding is prominent in Gregson's story of Laakhan as well (the ever changing name of Laakhan/ Lutchman is indicative of the continuous flux his character is enmeshed in, in order to serve the purposes of this alternate narrative) where he has a near death experience as he follows the hypnotic red lantern that Laakhan guides him with to a world of shadows which constantly eliminates all those who are excess to the pursuance of its goal.

This world of shadows constitutes the Cult of Silence that forms the other end of the spectrum of knowledge. Knowledge in this novel is not one that remains static awaiting disclosure. It is a dynamic force that constantly mutates itself to take new forms and remain a

deferred entity. Murugan calls it Counter-science or the impossibility of knowledge. It evades conventional understanding of knowledge and reigns in the domain of the unknowable:

Not making sense is what it's about—conventional sense that is...knowledge is self-contradictory; maybe they believed that to know something is to change it, therefore in knowing something, you've already changed what you think you know so you don't really know it at all: you only know its history. Maybe they thought that knowledge couldn't begin without acknowledging the impossibility of knowledge. ¹¹¹

This impossibility of knowledge is quite akin to Maurice Blanchot's idea of the Silence which eludes us and yet asks us to transcribe itself into language. Taking all commentary as necessarily unfaithful, much like transcribed knowledge in Ghosh, 'Silence in Blanchot is a gentle violence, a quiet devastation. It works its violence by fragmentation, a fragmentation not only of language but also of time, caught up for us in language... The fear which silence evokes, the ancient fear, is the fear of time and the absence of time, time which is never more than the coming of an absence, time which is not gathered into memory but fragmented in the return. But this silence, this absence, is also an opening. The infinite spaces which terrify are still the joyous openings which invite'¹¹². Silence in Blanchot is read in three forms: in terms of the future it is a call, an invitation; in present its work is to empty presence; and in respect to the past it is an act of both remembering and forgetting. The Cult of Silence reveals itself through these acts to erect a monument of the 'other' a Silence that haunts and claims its due from the men of this world.

Working through both Antar and his relationship with Tara and Murugan in his quest for the antecedent of malaria, Silence works as an invitation, a call towards a conversation where the pauses reflect the breaks in language which become portals to other knowledge systems. The pause constituted by silence is a break, and in it language is indeed broken; in the silence of madness it is cut open, put into question: "madness reveals a staggering depth, a subterranean violence, a knowledge that is boundless, devastating, and secret"¹¹³. This madness, containing within it the devastation of a secret that eternally remains hidden and yet observable in plain view to those who seek it, (represented in the novel through the bust of Ross in the backyard of Medical College) becomes the rupture through which the readers

¹¹¹ Ibid. p93.

¹¹² Karmen MacKendrick. 'immemorial silence: Maurice Blanchot'. *Immemorial Silence*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001 p19. PDF

¹¹³ Ibid. p21.

along with Murugan and Antar are shown a glimpse into the world of the other. This Other is Lutchman/Laakhan who is resurrected through the ages to complete the task of transmitting the Calcutta Chromosome from one age to another, assisting in the mutation of the knowledge. It is Mangala who transforms herself as a catalyst, the goddess of the subaltern, who instigates change all the while remaining in the shadows. It is also a Ronald Ross, Murugan and Antar who become the carriers of this knowledge, unwittingly; as Murugan explains, 'He thinks he's doing experiments on the malaria parasite. And all the time it's he who *is* the experiment on the malaria parasite'¹¹⁴.

In its dealing with the present tense of the novel, Silence as Blanchot states empties the space and time of its contemporary significance and imbues in it an archaic knowledge, one which is anarchic and violent. This is represented through how Ghosh utilises space and its meaning and turns it around to become a sigil for this counter science. To understand this, it is imperative to delve into the secondary plot of the novel involving Urmila, Sonali and the writer Phulboni. Phulboni the writer works from the other end of normative knowledge, literature, through which he wishes to bring forth the call of what he knows as the Silence. His stories of Laakhan, as discussed in the novel by Urmila and Sonali, become a reiteration of the myth that the journals of Ross, Grigson and the letters of Farley refer to, turning the myth into a mysterious past that alters everything it comes in contact with. This is true of the city which houses the myth as well. The Laakhan stories present the other side of historical date—mind maps which contain the key to unlock the unspeakable, the silenced part of History. In the first few pages of the novel, Ghosh introduces us to Phulboni giving an impassioned speech about the city that surrounds him as part of his acceptance of an award for excellence. The speech is important to understand how Silence works through the present, changing the contours and nature of the spaces into points of defiance:

Every city has its secrets...but Calcutta whose vocation is excess, has so many that it is more secret than any other. Elsewhere, by the workings of paradox, secrets live in the telling: they whisper life into humdrum street corners and dreary alleyways; into the rubbish-strewn rears of windowless tenements and the blackened floors of oil-bathed workshops. But here in our city where all law, natural and human, is held in capricious suspension, that which is hidden has no need of words to give it life; like any creature that

¹¹⁴ Amitav Ghosh. *The Calcutta Chromosome: a novel of fevers, delirium & discovery*. New Delhi: Penguin India 1996,2008, p 69. Print.

lives in a perverse element, it mutates to discover sustenance precisely where it appears to be most starkly withheld—in this case, in silence.¹¹⁵

Calcutta becomes the extension of the silence that engulfs and upturns the normative power structures of the Empire and through it returns the narrative agency to a subaltern that remains completely unassimilated into the colonial structure; Mangala and Lutchman probably know nothing more than a few words of English. Tabish Khair speaking about this agency remarks, ‘What Ghosh points at is another type of order and organisation that is simply not comprehensible to the colonial state due to the effects of alienation’¹¹⁶. This alienation is further exposed in the way the novel upturns the power ‘place’ plays upon its history to claim its legitimacy over ‘space’. Place defines itself through the knowable traits of tradition, culture and knowledge systems; traits through which it can claim its validation over the political power structures of space. The Calcutta Chromosome as a concept, a chromosome that can transfer one’s consciousness from one self to the other, supersedes the constraints of place as it is founded and developed by a group of people who see knowledge as unknowable and believe that to get to know it is to mutate it beyond recognition. Choosing vectors for its propagation like Ronald Ross, Murugan, Urmila and finally Antar, it rejects the unchanging and linear notions of historical place that can claim its position in time and space (for ex. Like the Empire which would take credit for Ross’s findings as a validation of its own superior rule over the ‘space’ of the colonies); instead it finds a route of alternate histories that percolate through the transference of consciousness, not seeking legitimization or validity but pushing its own boundaries of ‘knowability’ into a final whirling Immemorial—one which is achievable only through its unachievable nature. This Immemorial refuses to be boxed within knowledge systems, choosing to be mutated to the grotesque in order to be comprehensible. For Ghosh and his motley group of subalterns, it is this unknowable Immemorial that can free ‘space’ from the sectarian and constricted demands of ‘place’ in deciding the contours of its politics. It is that final haven that the antistory wishes to arrive at, the deferred goal whose achievement is the unlocking of the ‘Other’—the deep abyss of the unconscious.

This unconscious is represented by their alienation from the mainstream, the periphery which constantly challenges and defines the centre. As Murugan defines them to Antar, ‘Remember

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p22.

¹¹⁶ Tabish Khair. ‘The Example of Amitav Ghosh: (Re)establishing Connections’. *Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005 p309. Print.

that these guys haven't got a lot going for them: they're fringe people, marginal types; they are so far from the mainstream you can't see them from the shore'¹¹⁷. Therefore a Farley can only see them working through the surreal reflection of the glass tumbler in the laboratory: '...the distorted reflections of their faces seemed to take on a grotesque and frightening quality as they nodded and pointed across the room' (124-5).

This peripheral force works through the opposite of what rational science dictates—through magic, sacrifice and the supernatural. The ritual that has Farley as its hidden spectator stands in stark contrast to his own work in the laboratory; a violent meeting of the fanaticism of cult worship with the pristine rationality of the scientific laboratory. Yet, it is the ritual that provides science with the proof it requires for discovery: Laakhan giving him the slide that allows him to observe 'Laveran's rods appear, hundreds of them, tiny cylindrical things, with their pointed penetrating heads piercing the blood miasma' (132). This ritualistic ardour is carried on a few pages later, in a different time zone when Sonali becomes an unwilling spectator of the human sacrifice of her lover, Romen Halder for the resurrection of Laakhan. Khair further explains the importance of this blood ritual as he remarks,

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the human sacrifice is taken over and reinscribed within the subaltern agency and the subaltern's (suggested) discourses. From that perspective, it becomes a form of discovery, of furthering life and of planned purposive activity. It becomes in a way the exact opposite of what barbaric and irrational stand for—a planned means of personal improvement and collective well-being.¹¹⁸

The third aspect of the world of *Silence* is its effect on the past: influencing both what is to be remembered and what must be forgotten. Memory as Heidegger would say, is a gathering of recollection, where we collect different bits of knowledge to string them together into a coherent whole. But *Silence*, one that claims all, opens this secure space to the barbarism of fragmentation, linking the mind to a past with no memory. Memory is already caught up in the expectation of the future and 'implicated in the impossible necessity of return'¹¹⁹. Such a return does not allow us a coherent whole but rather a fragmented memory which evades our

¹¹⁷ Amitav Ghosh. *The Calcutta Chromosome: a novel of fevers, delirium & discovery*. New Delhi: Penguin India 1996,2008, p92. Print.

¹¹⁸ Tabish Khair. 'The Example of Amitav Ghosh: (Re)establishing Connections'. *Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005 pp306-7. Print.

¹¹⁹ Karmen MacKendrick. 'immemorial silence: Maurice Blanchot'. *Immemorial Silence*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001 p26. PDF

efforts at ascribing it meaning. One of the victims of Silence is C.C Dunn to whom Mme Salminen proclaims, ‘There is nothing I can do: the Silence has come to claim him’¹²⁰. Silence speaks outside the limits of language. It is neither pure future, one that is promised, nor a presence that is visible. It rather calls to memory the sense of having forgotten—what cannot be remembered, re-collected because it began at a point of fracture, at the very site of disruption. It is deeper and older than memory. ‘Forgetting is the primordial divinity, the venerable ancestor and first presence of what, in a later generation, will give rise to Mnemosyne.... The essence of memory is therefore forgetting; the forgetfulness of which one must drink in order to die. This is not a secondary forgetting, failing what we once knew or even remembered; it is a primordial forgetting of what we never knew, but always knew, somehow, that we would have known. All is past, all has already passed not into the safe recollection of memory but into the silence of pure loss—“had he then forgotten it, the meeting always to come that had, however, always already taken place, in an eternal past, eternally without present?”’¹²¹. It is this radical ancient forgetting that the subaltern represent, and channelize over the centuries; inserting themselves into the silences, the ruptures of language, History, memory and remembrance. Weaving through the prejudices of memory, choosing to reside within the untapped unconscious of the mind, the Silence makes itself known only in moments of its own annihilation: ‘the end credits have to come up at exactly the same instant that the story is revealed to whoever they’re keeping it for’¹²². Mutating knowledge over centuries is not only a way of bringing the Immemorial under the umbrella of the memorial project, but also one that destabilizes the despotism of unfettered knowledge: ‘...only way to escape the tyranny of knowledge is to turn it on itself. But for that to work they have to create a single perfect moment of discovery when the person who discovers is also that which is discovered’ (260).

CC as a narrative of counter-memories also remains suspicious of the micro histories that it recounts through the apparatuses of personal memories, generational stories and History. It is interesting to read the subtitle of the novel, which calls itself an amalgamation of delirium and fevers, both symptoms of the malarial parasite. The delirium induced in the narrative is that of contrasting narratives, each competing with the other in trying to establish itself as the

¹²⁰ Amitav Ghosh. *The Calcutta Chromosome: a novel of fevers, delirium & discovery*. New Delhi: Penguin India 1996,2008, p181. Print.

¹²¹ Karmen MacKendrick. ‘immemorial silence: Maurice Blanchot’. *Immemorial Silence*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001 p27. PDF.

¹²² Amitav Ghosh. *The Calcutta Chromosome: a novel of fevers, delirium & discovery*. New Delhi: Penguin India 1996,2008, p186. Print.

portal of the cult of Silence. The pre-eminence given to nightmares in the story, let it be Murugan's heat induced, mosquito bitten nightmare with the surreal glass shards at the end of it, or Phulboni's traumatic night at the railway station at Renupur surrounded by supernatural forces as well as the ghost train that tries to run him over, represent a nether world that lay just beyond the precipice of comprehension. One of the intriguing symbols in these events is the prop of the railway lantern which makes an appearance at various points in the course of the narrative. The railway in the colonial narratives serves as an example of physical and geographical connections, of ordered movement and of mapping the chaos of the unknown terrain into a semblance of civility. The railway lantern therefore stands as a symbol of the order that has to be continued in order for the greater structures to perform. It is ironic that in CC the red glowing railway lantern serves as a symbol of just the opposite: anarchy, incongruity and a sigil for disorder and disruption. The lantern also serves as a meeting point of the world of the knowable with that of the silent, unknowable Immemorial. Ghosh throughout the course of the novel destabilizes different symbols of the colonial narrative and through that subversion allows his readers to submit themselves to the delirium of the unknown, the ahistorical *antistory* which for all one knows is nothing but the fevered imagining of the last stage afflicted syphilis patient that Murugan is.

CC untangles multiple sources and textures of knowledge—a colonial understanding of a past which often colours the response of the postcolonial self. In doing so, Ghosh deconstructs the first person self of the postcolonial subjects—Antar, the remnant of the colonized world hailing from Egypt, the reader whose consciousness is shaped with a knowledge of the present through the diktats of the ordered past and finally the self of the authorial figure who embarks on this journey of assimilating alternate pasts.

He felt a cool soft touch upon his shoulders...now there was a restraining hand upon his wrist, and a voice in his ear, Tara's voice whispering: 'Keep watching; we're here; we're all with you.'

There were voices everywhere now, in his room, in his head, in his ears, it was as though a crowd of people were in the room with him. They were saying: 'We're with you; you're not alone; we'll help you across.'¹²³

¹²³ Ibid. p262.

The last few lines of the narrative play with myriad possibilities of the 'we' that surround and drown out Antar into a final surrender. At the beginning of the novel, Antar is seen as a loner who having lost his wife and child at childbirth leads a sedentary life, often running from the history that should define his identity. His sense of claustrophobia listening to the regional dialect of his hometown, his refusal in keeping company with others, all merge towards his desire to reach that moment of memory where the rupture happens: the point of original forgetting. The fact that Ghosh names him after the well-known Egyptian hero Antarah ibn Shaddad, a pre-Islamic poet and warrior, one who represents a myth before the recorded History sets in, is symbolic of his task of playing a similar role of the scribe of pasts which lay beyond the documented. His postcolonial self that is represented through the frequent musings of his past in Egypt and his movement into this dystopia of commercial complexes is finally put to rest as he submits himself to the whirls of multiple contrasting pasts which merge into one another, wiping out the traces—he is finally freed of History, and his last actions, 'He sat back and sighed as he hadn't sighed in years' (260) mirror that freedom.

Murugan's explanation of the special chromosome that does not transmit through sexual reproduction but through a special recombination of the non-reproductive organ like the brain, one that he names the Calcutta Chromosome stands as the second moment of freeing from the onslaught of the postcolonial self—both for the reader as well as the philosophy that Ghosh is trying to postulate. As Murugan explains to Urmila that only a Mangala, who remains outside the loop of colonial knowledge systems can find it and utilize it to transfer knowledge systems, it systematically points towards a new self that can arise out of this ahistorical awareness. Mangala as Murugan says wants to play 'god' as she believes no one can 'ever know her, or her motives, or anything about her' (215); the inscrutability of her process is the sign of its success. This lies as a direct antithesis of the colonial process and the postcolonial reaction to it—one which is guided by a scrupulous ordering of data and processes. Deconstructing the postcolonial ordered self that answers in terms of and in response to the colonial archival History, it is a clever stroke that Ghosh plays by affecting his main interpreter Murugan with syphilis, a disease that ravages his mind. Murugan and his knowledge of the alternate non-documented pasts as well as the mysterious boy with poach-marks (again showing physical signs of the same disease) who hounds him from the third 'other', an othering of the very process of the 'other'—one that is freed from a reciprocal and symbiotic sustenance. This emergence of the third other becomes an interesting point of

discussion in terms of the political ethics of the modern postcolonial world. While referring to the Calcutta Chromosome Murugan states, 'Biologists are under so much pressure to bring their findings into line with politics: right-wing politicians sit on them to find genes for everything, from poverty to terrorism, so they'll have an alibi for castrating the poor or nuking the Middle East. The left goes ballistic if they say anything at all about the biological expression of human traits: it's all consciousness and soul at the end of the spectrum' (213). This statement becomes indicative of the problem that Ghosh tries to address through the narrative: the problem of binaries and absolutes. It is this absolutism that endangers the postcolonial self as it submerges itself into an archive of identities tailor-made for itself by the very forces that it opposes. The politics of the postcolonial self is a politics of grasping and refiguring the power-structures: Ghosh realizes that it will remain an unachieved mile as long as the postcolonial continues to see itself through the prism of being 'post'-colonial. He identifies that power will remain a prerogative of the struggle and therefore to change the narrative it was more important to subvert those very channels of power. Therefore, much like the parasite that keeps changing its nature such that the host body cannot detect the threat and form defences, the new self of the subaltern is one which is not answerable or amenable to the structures of the documented History: instead it is part of an ever-changing, tumultuous Immemorial which refuses to be caught up in archives, one which contains within it the infinite power of rewriting the script, to write its own self in.

The Hungry Tide

While CC grapples with counter memory through the fast-paced narrative quite akin to a thriller where the reader is as much a part of the discovery of the subaltern plot as the protagonist Antar, HT is a more muted and nuanced exploration into the untapped world of the ahistorical Immemorial visualised through the expanses of the Tide Country, Sunderbans. Often considered one of his most subtle and complex works, HT through the simple story of the search of a special variety of South Asian dolphins, the Irrawaddy Dolphin, churns out multiple vantage points of understanding the facets of *antistory*. Fusing together mythology, remembrances and numerous languages, each of which remain exclusive and often impenetrable to the other, HT presents a worldview that is curiously aware of its own failure to subjugate itself to the ravages of official History; instead it cultivates within itself, just like the mangroves, generations of ghosts which remain suspended over the everyday, working

much like the *bādh* which is ‘not just the guarantor of human life on our island; it is also our abacus and archive, our library of stories’¹²⁴.

Reading the text through the lens of *antistory*, it becomes imperative to analyse it from three perspectives which will garner the answer to how successful/ unsuccessful is the project of counter-histories and identify the pitfalls which often relegate it to the oblivion of memory: firstly, HT is an intricate play of languages—both spoken and written, of sounds and silences, each of which bring forth a new dimension to the philosophy of the *antistory*; secondly, Sunderbans, its islands and flora and fauna become the personification of a world that remains in the shadows, the horizon between the unchanging tenets of the normative State and the continuously fluctuating milieu of the natural world; thirdly reading HT as remembrances of refugees and the homeless who remain trapped between a careless state and a forgetful public memory. In reading each of these angles within the storyline the efficacy of the *antistory* and the success of the narrator to bring it within the purview of the normative becomes the two points of reference that form the basis of this alternate theorising of the historical project.

Reading, Speaking, Writing: Language as the gatekeeper of counter histories

“‘You can’t go in that way’, Nirmal was saying. ‘Don’t you remember? The key to the front door was lost years ago. We’ll have to go all the way around.’”(39)

These inconspicuous lines that Nirmal utter to the young Kanai as they sit on the jetty at Canning resonates the basic philosophy of the novel, indicative of the histories that Kanai would try to decipher through the ‘back entry’ of the diary notes of a past that remains buried. Ghosh, interestingly a few pages back had already established Nirmal as a maddened entity of those histories which were being hoarded to be exterminated by the State, thus, allowing the readers to anticipate how he will act as the opening to a parallel world of pasts that remain hidden or lost in the Tide Country.

Language becomes one of the ciphers to the cryptic world of the forests and the islands. Language configures itself through the expressions of reading, writing, listening and speaking, forms ties, exposes alienation and interprets memories. The initial lines of the text which introduces the readers to Kanai in the crowded railway station further accentuates the

¹²⁴ Amitav Ghosh. *The Hungry Tide*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers 2004 p.202. Print.

eminent position language will conquer in the narrative: ‘Language was both his livelihood and his addiction and he was often preyed upon by a near irresistible compulsion to eavesdrop on conversations in public places’(4). However, such knowledge still does not allow him complete submersion into any space that he moves into—in that busy station, Kanai is as foreign in his city-bred dialects as a Piya who neither understands nor speaks Bangla. For Piya, Bangla remains a language that concretises the memories of her parents’ failed marriage and her mother’s wasting away to cancer. It is a language which oppresses her with a past which she is continuously outrun: the past of a friendless child caught up in the warring words of parents too proud to give in yet insensitive enough to utilise that very language to use the child as a messenger— ‘their voices had a way of finding her...the accumulated resentments of their life were always phrased in that language, so that for her, its sound had come to represent the music of unhappiness. As she lay curled in the cupboard, she would dream of washing her head of those sounds...with nothing attached [to them] except meanings that could be looked up in a dictionary—empty of pain, memory and inwardness’ (94).

Contrasted to Piya’s evasion of Bangla as a language of trauma, for Nirmal and Nilima, Kanai’s uncle and aunt, Bangla represents a freedom from the oppressive structures of the city and by extension the official domain of English, the state’s language. While English was the language that made them fall in love with each other (Nirmal was an English professor and Nilima was his student enamoured by his fiery lectures), it was also a language that trapped Nirmal into the conspiracy of falsely being implicated at being a part of the communist insurgency in Burma and incarcerating him. The move to Lusibari was to escape the tyranny of the state which had already broken Nirmal’s resolve and transformed him from a revolutionary to one who sought loneliness. Caught up between the romance of his idealism and a world that rejects it, Nirmal secedes into his headmaster’s job till Kusum and the refugees reinvigorate his dead desires into one illuminated moment of rebellion: a rebellion not fought with arms or armies but by challenging history through words and a language that captures that desire; as Nirmal happily says, ‘Kusum, I’ll teach them to dream’ (173).

The Badabon Trust that Nilima starts in order to help the disenfranchised widows of Lusibari becomes the second point of their investment into a land which had become ironically both their refuge as well as their incarceration. While Nirmal does not support Nilima’s endeavour, considering it ‘social service’ that actually does not change the inequalities of the world, he is the one who invests it with a name that reflects the multifarious nature of its

work as well as the world that it operates in: ‘...it was he who gave the Trust its name, which came from the Bengali word for “mangrove”. *Badabon* was a word Nirmal loved. He liked to point out that like the English “bedouin”, *badabon* derived from the Arabic *badiya* which means “desert”. But Bedouin is merely an anglicising of Arabic... while our Bangla word joins Arabic to Sanskrit—“bada” to “bon” or forest. It is as though the word itself were an island, born out of the meeting of two great rivers of language—just as the tide country is begotten of the Ganga’s union with the Brahmaputra’¹²⁵.

Like the name of the Trust, much of the Tide Country is a play of discourses that percolate generationally and provide sustenance to the inhabitants of the islands against the harshness of an unforgivable nature. The myth of Bon Bibi and Dokkhin Rai forms that narrative universe that works quite like an origin myth for the islanders. The simple story of Bon Bibi and her brother protecting the free folk of the islands from the greed and darkness of Dokkhin Rai who hunts through the avatar of his favourite animal, the man-eating tiger, is reiterated numerous times through the course of the narrative and forms the ethos of the Sunderbans. However, Ghosh as a narrator is also weary of such legends of origin as they further the movement of created and discursive history over the actual ahistorical that works within the marshlands. This is poignantly shown through the juxtaposition of the ‘*jatra*’ that is put up retelling the story of the greatness of Bon Bibi and the story of the death of Kusum’s father. The *jatra* which enamours the young Kanai as it retells the story of the glory of Bon Bibi as she saves the young boy from the clutches of the demon Dokkhin Rai, is undercut in the very next scene as Kanai’s interest is interrupted by a distraught Kusum and he follows her only to find the source of her sorrow to be the same goddess figure who lords of the consciousness of all and sundry in the tide country. Kusum’s passive reply as she watched the stage Dukhey calling on the goddess, ‘I called her too...she never came’ when compared to her impassioned ‘she sank to her knees and began to whisper, “Help, O Mother of Mercy, O Bon Bibi, save my father”’ as her father became victim to a tiger attack before her eyes, starkly bring out the pathetic shadow that remains between the myth and the reality. In the everyday reality of the Sunderbans the Dokkhin Rais parading as helpful uncles (Dilip, the human trafficker) win much more often than the Bon Bibis and her likes (Nirmal and Nilima’s desperate efforts to rehabilitate Kusum fail as she finally runs away to find her mother who has been sold off into the flesh trade by Dilip). Language therefore becomes suspect, one that

¹²⁵ Ibid. p82.

hides and distorts much better than it reveals. Piya takes this a step further as she muses over her language-less interactions with Fokir and their effect on her:

Whatever it way, she would never know: not just because they had no language in common but because that was how it was with human beings, who came equipped, as a species, with the means of shutting each other out. The two of them, Fokir and herself, they could have been boulders or trees for all they knew of each other: and wasn't it better in a way, more honest, that they could not speak? For if you compared it to the ways in which dolphins' echoes mirrored the world, speech was only a bag of tricks that fooled you into believing that you could see through the eyes of another being.¹²⁶

Even though Piya believes that words never can truly express the consciousness from one to the other, Moyna realises the potential that language carries within itself in bringing to surface all that which had remained invisible and submerged. While she recognizes the disconnect that lay between her relationship with Fokir, she loves him with a fierceness that undermines that divide. She is quick to realise that Piya is oddly attracted to Fokir, irrespective of their lack of commonality, both in terms of choices and languages, yet she also appreciates that the very lack of language becomes the meeting point of both of them, each running from the tyranny of the spoken word. Moyna approaching Kanai to act as a translator between Piya and Fokir, and her imploration, 'It's you who stands between them: whatever they say to each other will go through your ears and your lips... Their words will be in your hands and you can make them mean what you will' (257) is not merely a jealous wife asking another male to keep her husband in check in her absence, but an action which reiterates the power that words, both spoken and written, are given in creating discourses of illusions and complexities to avoid the oppression of a natural world which is cruel, impersonal and often vengeful.

Kanai, as a translator who knows multiple languages and takes pleasure to deciphering people's origins from the way they speak, is given two translation projects in the narrative: one to make sense of his uncle's dying wish for him to read his journal and his own interest to translate the song that Fokir hums in their expedition. While both these assignments may seem different from each other, Ghosh subtly presents clues throughout the narrative to show how similar they both are, springing forth from that same moment of crisis of language when

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* p159.

History violently suppresses all other voices and the debris of it this assault will be quickly engulfed by the expansive natural world of the ahistorical. Thus, the immediacy to leave behind crumbs that will lead the future towards the pasts which have been disposed off:

I am afraid because I know that after the storm passes, the events that have preceded its coming will be forgotten. No one knows better than I how skilful the tide country is in silting over its past. There is nothing I can do to stop what lies ahead. But I was once a writer; perhaps I can make sure at least that what happened here leaves some trace, some hold upon the memory of the world. (69)

(First entry from Nirmal's journal about Morichjhāpi)

Nirmal's journal about the Morichjhāpi plays out the important role that language as well as the writer has in times of turmoil. Nirmal's words and the invocation of the figure of the Poet who watches the unfolding of the brutality of History over the disenfranchised subalterns present the scope of the *antistory* to wade through the currents of indifferent time and an ever engulfing space to establish its claim over a future which carries the redemption of its debts. The diary, making its appearance in every alternate chapters of the narrative in both the parts, comes across with more urgency in the 'Jowar' than the 'Bhata'. Jowar, a nautical term for the flooding of the river due to high tide while resonates with the later storm in the narrative which claims Fokir's life, also represents the metaphorical flooding of memories over the characters as well as the Tide Country that swallows all in its infinite self. It is curious that the journal which was presumably lost, suddenly finds its way to Kanai and yet refuses to remain with him. It is a moment of suspended shock as the storm 'spun him [Kanai] around and knocked him sidewise into the water. He thrust his hands into the mud and came up spluttering. He scrambled up to his feet just in time to the notebook bobbing in the current...it stayed on the surface for a couple more minutes before sinking out of sight' (376). The drowning of the diary is almost like an omen, the final flash of the Immemorial before it passes into its rightful place in the vast recesses of the ahistorical. The notebook had stood till this moment as a gatekeeper between the discursive world of written and documented past and the vast, unwritten chaos of the *antistory* where time and space fuse into nothingness, in the whirlpool of the unknowable, the Immemorial. Therefore, Kanai, as the writer and the historian-chronicler needs to seize this moment before the disappearance of the trace and transcribe it into the documented archives which till now had remained unconscious of it. It is fitting that the narrative ends with an epilogue where Nilima informs Piya about Kanai's

project of wanting to ‘write the story of Nirmal’s notebook—how it came into his hands, what was in it, and how it was lost’(399).

Fokir’s song too mirrors that moment of anxiety of the Immemorial as it flashes past into oblivion. While Piya can tap Fokir’s knowledge of the vestibules of the tide country through her GPS, one which immortalises his mind even post death, the songs that he sing, which bring out the quintessence of the world he inhabits is something that her instruments cannot read or store. Therefore it falls on Kanai, the enabler between the two worlds to transcribe it into words. However, he is aware of the truth that the entirety of it cannot be captured; he remarks,

You [Piya] asked me what Fokir was singing and I said I couldn’t translate it: it was too difficult. And this was no more than the truth, for in those words there was a history that is not just his own but also of this place, the tide country...those words were much more than a part of a legend: this was the story that gave this land its life.¹²⁷

What he attempts is only a poor imitation, yet one that once again catches the ancient pasts as they are about to disappear.

Ghosh continuously brings together a dance of language and silence throughout the course of the novel. For every chapter chronicling the wordless, language-less conversations and interactions between Fokir and Piya, the very next chapter is filled to the brim with words, dialogues, letters and diary entries, flowing ceaselessly from the past. For every motiveless action of Fokir, Ghosh gives us an ambitious Moyna who wants to outstep the destiny that has been meted out to her. For every chapter devoted to the present of the narrative, the very next one hurls the readers into the dark recesses of a tumultuous past. Ghosh plays with these extremes of silence and language, past and present to explore the picture of a world which itself becomes a testament to extremities: those of weather, land and time.

Languages in their most primitive forms, dialects, body movements and half-understood words in HT works as the last threshold between the archival official History that sees the wetlands as nothing more than a tourist spot for fleecing the eager and naïve vacationer with the bait of showing them the fearsome tiger, and the actual, wordless world of the tide country that even though refuses to name the animal that acts as a vengeful god-figure to

¹²⁷ Ibid. p354.

them yet arrange their entire lives around the myths and stories that speak of it. Silence is as much a language in these parts as the written document; often encompassing all that which comes in contact with it. Yet, the personal, be it in nightmares, remembrances, blocked memories or folk songs, triumphs over its finality, surging ahead in its attempt to be acknowledged and accepted; the past, present and the future merging into unveiling the *antistory*.

Sunderbans: The ‘Space-Place’ nexus for the antistory

The narrative of HT unlike the other novels of Ghosh is not broken down in terms of actions of the characters (as in SL, COR) or the change in the location of the action (as in GP), rather the division happens in terms of the changing contours of the topography which houses the action. HT is the only non-fictional work of Ghosh which refuses to juggle with multiple places and stands rooted to one place; it morphs itself as well as the characters according to the many moods of the place. Politics of space and place have been an important part of all of Ghosh’s works, yet it is in HT that it receives its most complex reading. The Sunderbans, in the first few pages of the novel, is introduced to the readers as a protagonist who is both whimsical as well as unforgiving. The description of the Tide country that Kanai reads out from his uncle’s notes is a curious mixture of the mythology of the origin of the Ganga with the lived history of the environment, thus, ushering in a ‘*mohana*’ (synthesis) of its own. In that *mohana* lays the immense archipelago of islands, ‘the trailing threads of India’s fabric, the ragged fringe of her saree, the *āchol* that follows her, half-wetted by the sea...these islands are the rivers’ restitution, the offerings through which they return to the earth what they have taken from it, but in such a form as to assert their permanent dominion over their gift’ (7). The islands and their inhabitants understand that theirs is a loaned life, borrowed from a world which is temperamental and can claim its debts at any point, without any warning or sympathy. They therefore, look for their sustenance in the myths and legends which provides them with the tools to form illusions about a second nature, one which is created by benevolent gods like the figure of Bon Bibi which is kind and nurturing.

The Sunderbans are special in the way that the forests are unlike any other, where there aren’t long and shady trees but mud and mangroves that at every step drowns out any act of permanence associated with human enterprise. ‘...the specialty of mangroves is that they do not merely recolonize land; they erase time. Every generation creates its own population of ghosts’ (50). It is these ghosts of time past that Kanai, Nirmal, Piya and Fokir are in search

of. As Piya and Fokir move more into the heart of the wetlands, they both realise the burden of truth that they carry within them, that they owe to the memory of all those who have perished in their fight against the brutality of this system. Yet, even that viciousness carries within itself a terrible beauty, one that inspires awe as well as acts as an intoxicant, slowly enamouring the outsider and drawing it in to its own demise.

The forests and the river form together a moment of ahistoricity which stands in contrast to the historical permanence of the people who pepper the narrative. While the fishermen like Horen or the women in the islands like Nilima or Moyna categorise time and its causal effect on their lives through submitting the many moods of the surrounding nature to the linear archive of history, like dates of storms, names of storms, which storm led to the building of which portion of the dams or the hospital's wings, the elements of the nature refuse to submit itself to such simplistic notions of categorisation. This is evinced through the world of the dolphins that both Ghosh and his character Piya aim to capture in their most natural forms. This world lies sharply in the zone of the ahistorical, contrasting to the historical world that is captured in Nirmal's notebook discussing the story of the refugees. Fokir finds himself caught up in the grey zone between these two contradictory worlds: having been a part of the historical that had cost him his mother, he keenly desires to break free, and abide the rules of the ahistorical—rules which remain brutal yet just and unchanged. It is this yearning for the ahistorical that prevents him from participating in the worldly life of Lusibari with his wife; he prefers to disappear into the limitless horizons of the tide country. This is further brought out at his extreme unease at being at home in Lusibari as he tries to re-engage himself within the confines of domesticity.

Nature in HT is not simply a plane for the ahistorical and limitless to play themselves out against the constraints of the historical. At multiple times in the narrative it also works to form bridges between these two disparate worlds, call each of them out in their eccentricities and recall an ancient past to the personal memories of the characters such that they carry them forward. One of the reiterative examples of this in the novel is the role of the dolphins in the overall structure of the narrative. The painstakingly minute details that are provided by Ghosh throughout the course of the novel are not merely to embellish the language of the narrative or to create a plausible background for Piya. The dolphins serve as a dialogue between the extremes of beliefs that lay dormant in individuals, expressed through religion, myth, beliefs. Articulated through the wonder that the secularist Nirmal feels at watching the

dolphins which are called as ‘Bon Bibi’s messengers’, the dolphins morph themselves into the role of the Poet who brings together a synthesis of disparate world views:

Now I [Nirmal] saw why Kusum found it so easy to believe that these animals were something other than they are. For where she had seen a sign of Bon Bibi, I saw instead, the gaze of the Poet. It was as if he were saying to me:

‘some mute animal
raising its calm eyes and seeing through us,
and through us. This is destiny...’¹²⁸

The story of Bon Bibi and the invisible line of protection that she draws over, differentiating territories serve as reminders to two important philosophies that Ghosh wishes to bring forth in his narrative: firstly, the world of symbiotic relationship between the jungle and its inhabitants, and the humans in the islands and how that is negotiated; secondly and more importantly, exploring the central conflict between human rights and animal conservation. The first relates to the second as it is through the first question that the conflict is visualised by the characters in the novel. The symbiotic relationship that exists between the people and the nature that surrounds them is first captured through the violent killing of a tiger which had wandered in into a human settlement. Piya grounds this through her sense of horror at the bestiality of the custom, ‘Last night: I still can’t get it out of my head—I keep seeing it again and again—the people, the flames. It was like something from some other time—before *recorded history*.’ (300)¹²⁹. While ‘recorded history’ relegates this to being an uncivilized horror, as testified by Piya’s anger at both Fokir and Horen for stopping her from opposing the barbaric act, it is a relationship which allows both these disparate worlds to remain together in amnesty. This relationship also demands necessity as the governing principle of all action; Kanai is perceived to be one who violates this principle as Nilima points it to him, ‘To our way of thinking you *are* the risk. The others are going because they need to—but not you. You’re going on a whim, a *kheyal*.’(243). Therefore Kanai needs to face the consequences of this break: his supernatural experience in the forest which renders him both paralysed with awe as well as appreciative of the horror of this other world breaks open the narrative into newer directions as he ponders over the role of a translator and writer like

¹²⁸ Amitav Ghosh. *The Hungry Tide*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers 2004 p.235. Print.

¹²⁹ Italics mine.

himself in times of overlapping of these two extremes—the historical and the ahistorical antistory. It is this desire to know that compels him to translate Fokir’s song, however imperfectly for Piya, to make her aware of those same fallacies that he had believed to be transcendental truths before he wishes to return to Delhi. This also sparks the final point of the discussion that Ghosh partakes, that of the refugees and the question of human rights.

The mingling of the antistory with the ahistorical –reading violence in displacement

HT deals with multiple ideas of displacement and the disenfranchisement that comes along with it: the refugees of Morichjhāpi, the foreigner Indian Piya who is unable to belong to any place permanently and the natives of the islands who are caught between the fury of the Tide Country and the apathy of the state government and civil society who see them as collaterals as they fall through the cracks in history. The islanders who are mostly from the lower castes are often seen as violators of the state rules of animal conservation and the massacre at Morichjhāpi confirm that in position of power, even a government which prides itself on an ideology of inclusion is nothing but a tool for furthering the social disparity. What Morichjhāpi displays is not simply the violence of displacement of refugees, but more importantly the continuance of caste politics that remains ingrained in the psyche of the nation and the wilful denial of secularists like Nirmal, Nilima or Kanai to come abreast with it. To understand this, it is first imperative to have an overview of the real events that led to the massacre:

Following Partition, many Hindu East Bengalis started migrating to India and especially to West Bengal to escape persecution in their homeland. Joya Chatterji mentions how this happened in waves with the initial migrants mainly representing well connected upper classes (106). Those who arrived later were from the lower strata of society- the *namasudras*- with little or no resources of their own. Naturally these people were seen as economic liabilities and forced to settle in hastily made rehabilitation zones like those of Dandakaranya- their “dumping site”. However tutored in the ways of paddy cultivation, fishing and carpentry, these migrants were unable to adapt to the arid infertile soil of central India. In 1978, a group of refugees originally from the Khulna district of East Bengal, started marching to Morichjhāpi, an uninhabited island in Sunderbans with the hope that the new Communist government would fulfil its promise, having supported their cause earlier. ...the

political ascendancy of the Left owed a great deal to the refugees who were encouraged to seek shelter within Bengal. However in a dramatic reversal of policy, the Jyoti Basu government now refused to entertain their demands. The state imposed an economic blockade and sunk the boats of the islanders thereby reducing Morichjhāpi to a panoptican structure. While most people died of starvation and cholera, others were killed in police firing and arson attacks.¹³⁰

In one of the different discussions between Kanai and Nilima, Nilima points out a fact which becomes the point of entry into the dilemmas that the massacre brings forth: ‘To build something is not the same as dreaming of it: building is always a matter of well-chosen compromise’¹³¹. This compromise is one which becomes the death-knell for the refugees as they become the symbol for the continuation of the government in power, often at the cost of the ideologies that they represent. Ghosh is critical of the complacency of the middle class secularists who are blind to the reality of the situation as they try and submerge themselves in what Nirmal at various points in the novel sardonically calls as ‘social service’¹³². Therefore, Nilima, who believes herself to be a pioneer as she starts a trust for the women of the islands cannot dissociate herself from the government’s stand and even risks her own relationship with her husband rather than taking a stand. Similarly, Kanai is contemptuous of Fokir and his rustic knowledge and at every point questions the efficacy of the ways of these people who according to him remain in darkness of illiteracy and worldly knowledge. Yet, the narrative shows ample ways in which these disenfranchised ones are much better at negotiating their space in relation to nature than the state-sponsored ideas. Therefore, the myth of Bon Bibi and the imaginary line that divides the territories of the worlds of the non-humans from those of humans are much more effective than the official protected forest areas which become a prey to the greed of the forest officials and are often more effective on paper than in reality. The pact between nature and the islanders, wherever broken causes both to pay for that transgression: the tiger burning in the village or Fokir’s death as he kindles a death drive that deliberately leads him to the heart of the forests. As Horen warns ‘The rule, Saar, is that when we go ashore, we can leave nothing of yourself behind’ the liminal world

¹³⁰ Rajorshi Das. ‘Reading Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* through the History and Legacy of Morichjhāpi’. *The Golden Line: A Magazine of English Literature*, Vol:1 No.2 2015. Web. <http://www.goldenline.bcdedu.net/amitav-ghosh-the-hungry-tide/>. 20.04.2016

¹³¹ Amitav Ghosh. *The Hungry Tide*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers 2004 p.214. Print.

¹³² *Ibid.* p82.

that these islanders inhabit is much more clearly demarcated than what is believed by the intellectuals in the novel.

Even though caste is not overtly explored in the novel, it does become a driving force through not only the massacre but through the individual choices of the various characters. Kanai's disdain for Fokir and admiration for Moyna comes from the utilitarian capitalist ideal that hard work can transcend all barriers—even if Moyna wants to overcome her caste, it always plays itself to remind her that it is not an article of cloth that can be discarded at will; behind it lays years of oppression that needs to be first acknowledged before any measures of rectification can be thought of. While Kanai remains oblivious to the inherent elitism in his outlook, Piya, living in a vacuum in all her years as a cetologist is quick to decipher this ingrained discrimination. She however, also realises a bigger truth: the inevitability of a figure like Fokir in the growth story that Kanai wants to peddle as the story of the nation—

She understood now that for Kanai there was a certain reassurance in meeting a woman like Moyna, in such a place as Lusibari: it was as if her very existence were a validation of the choices he had made in his own life. It was important for him to believe that his values were, at bottom, egalitarian, liberal, meritocratic. It reassured him to be able to think, 'What I want for myself is no different from what everybody wants, no matter how rich or poor; everyone who has any drive, any energy wants to get on in the world—Moyna is the proof.' Piya understood too that this was a looking-glass in which a man like Fokir could never be anything other than a figure glimpsed through a rear-view mirror, a rapidly diminishing presence, a ghost from the perpetual past that was Lusibari. But she guessed also that despite its newness and energy, the country Kanai inhabited was full of these ghosts, these unseen presences whose murmurings could never quite be silenced no matter how loud you spoke.¹³³

The massacre at Morichjhāpi therefore represents much more than a discarding of people without homes; it is a wilful and vindictive breakdown of an alternate social structure that would for once remedy the centuries of exploitation and social hierarchy. As Nirmal correctly recognizes this as he notes in his journal: 'Was it possible, even, that in Morichjhāpi had been planted the seeds of what might become if not a Dalit nation, then at least a safe haven, a place of true freedom for the country's most oppressed?'¹³⁴ Nirmal also realises the failure of

¹³³ Amitav Ghosh. *The Hungry Tide*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers 2004 pp.219-20. Print.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* p191.

ideology as he understands that ideology is aimed not at an overturning of the structures of power, but a reaffirmation of those very structures, only this time with the revolutionaries at their helm, working out the same power relations. He therefore visualises a new way, through the figure of the impassioned Poet to usher in a change of power play. The recurrence of the figure of the Poet from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* marks the shift into a world of hurricane of spirit, a boundlessness of the human mind to transform the crisis of existence and build something new out of it. Nirmal's refusal to leave the island or his obsession with Kusum stems from this desire for creation of a novel society of the oppressed where home is more than just a place that one refuses to leave—home is a political statement, to express one's right to belong; 'This is the time for what can be said. Here is its country. Speak and testify' (275). What History chooses to ignore, Nirmal immortalises it through his notebook, one he interestingly leaves with the subjugated Horen, rather than Nilima to be given to Kanai. Kanai who he feels will have a 'greater claim to the world's ear than I ever had... Your generation will, I know, be richer in ideals, less cynical, less selfish than mine' (278). The burden of the unsayable past, the *antistory* comes to claim its debt from the future and thus, Horen can find the lost notebook just in time to give it to Kanai, while Kanai accepts the task of reclaiming the *antistory* through not simply reproducing his uncle's notebook which by drowning makes it even more urgent for him to capture it in its immediacy and render it to the world. It is fitting that Fokir's death not only brings Piya to the islands to fight for the disenfranchised and marginal inhabitants of the islands as they struggle for their rights against an apathetic state machinery, but also Kanai who becomes the figure of the historian that Benjamin talks of in his reading of the 'other' histories, one who would aim to give the past what has been owed to it by both the present and the future, to bring it full circle and for that 'it'll be good to have him home' (399).

The Glass Palace

GP as a novel even though chronologically comes before HT, yet seems more of a later work in terms of following the larger picture of the philosophy that Ghosh is trying to address through his fiction. GP stands at the juncture that divides Ghosh's fictional work into two distinctive phases: the early novels dealing with the question of nations and ideology governing them and the second phase which looks at ancient histories which have been obliterated from the pages of official History as they conflict the linearity of victorious progression towards a promising future with their disparate, heterogeneous and polyphonic voices of dissent. GP follows the intertwined family histories of several characters over a

period of around hundred years much like Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. However, while Marquez's Buendia family proliferates reflecting the history of the land they inhabit, Ghosh's families begin from a point of deconstruction: the loss of power of the Royal family and what that entails to the everyday lived reality of the people. The worlds of Rajkumar, Dolly, Uma, Saya John, Mathew and their subsequent generations mirror the contrasting realities that simultaneously compete to take over as the main narrative and through that struggle explore the bloody legacy of the colonial rule over the subcontinent. Flitting from one place to the other, the narrative is broken down into seven parts, each representing not only a place but also an ethos whose death signifies a travel into the next segment of the narrative. Charting a circle, quite akin to the shadow lines that the young narrator in SL draws—tying knots of familiarity between dissimilar places—the narrative begins in Mandalay and comes back full circle with a different generation to that same place in the seventh part, fittingly named 'The Glass Palace'. The Glass Palace, the palace of Queen Supalyat and King Thebaw remain as a symbol of deferred dream that is sought after throughout the course of the narrative. As Sajal Kumar Bhattacharya remarks, in GP,

...Ghosh has set himself the task of narrating an anti-Hegelian history of the world, incorporating the hitherto left out narratives of the common individual, the predicament of individuals against the historical backdrop, their attempt to resist the hegemony of the nation through their own stories and the search for their own identity.¹³⁵

Reading the narrative on the lines of the points of analysis that this chapter has been following, the narrative will be broadly read through four different critical lenses: firstly, place as an indicator of the histories that remain buried under the weight of official mapping of History; secondly, the colonial system and the idea of utilitarian capitalism that it invokes; thirdly, the position of the army against the greater narrative of selfhood and nation; fourthly, family narrative as the antistory that functions as tools to expose the limits of historicity and finally, as an extension to it the role of the author/*sutradhar* in the act of choosing which histories to remember and which to forget.

¹³⁵ Sajal Kumar Bhattacharya. "'Live My Prince; Hold on to your Life": Issues of Transnational life and Identity in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*'. Eds. Tapan Kumar Ghosh & Prasanta Bhattacharya. *In Pursuit Of Amitav Ghosh: Some Recent Readings*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2013 p. 143. Print.

No Home but in memory: The map of spaces

At first glance, GP can be read as a travelling narrative, one that charts out a distinctive map for itself in order to best delineate its stories. Beginning in the grandeur of pre-colonial Burma, it trudges along to Ratnagiri, a small coastal town in India, to the busy humdrum middle class life of Calcutta, back into the charming and majestic nature surrounded castle of Morningside, into the muddied trenches of the war front and finally coming home to the illusory glass palace, one which bears little resemblance to the past that is only partly obtainable through photos, letters and other personal tokens of remembrance. The spaces in the text carry within them not only the burden of a past legacy that place had invested on it, but also political significance such that their occupation plays out a larger role in the creation of official history as well as policies that form the fabric of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, the ruler and the subject, the past and the present.

One of the first spaces that assume this role of deciphering the power relations is the palace of the King of Burma, whimsically named as the Glass Palace due to its jewel encrusted glass walls which remain both fetishized as the ultimate dream of the commoner and yet is one whose destruction is the suppressed desire of the common subject. This dichotomous relationship is played out when the commoners storm the palace post the colonial attack, breaking, defacing, looting all that they could find in a clear assertion of the toppling of power structures, yet the moment Queen Supalyat, the human personification of that place emerges from its womb, they can do nothing but realise the impossibility of ever transgressing the invisible bonds of power discourses:

Everyone who came through the door fell to the floor in a spontaneous act of homage. Now, when she was powerless to chastise them, they were glad to offer her these tokens of respect; they were glad even to hear her rail at them. It was good that they should shiko and she berate them. Were she meekly to accept her defeat none would be so deeply shamed as they. It was as though they were entrusting her with the burden of their own inarticulate defiance.¹³⁶

The Palace in Mandalay also serve a metonymic purpose to represent the invisible bonds of commonality that bind the people together and give them an identity that is already vested

¹³⁶ Amitav Ghosh. *The Glass Palace*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000 p34. Print.

with meaning from which they can draw solace. The defeat of the dynasty of Thebaw and their subsequent exile robs the people of this grounding of identities and the outpouring of grief that springs from them is the keening for the death of those former selves who now need to find new anchors as their identity markers, define new points of commonality –face the vivid reality of the moment freed from the fantasy of governance and similarity.

While Mandalay represents the slow death of the old order, Ratnagiri and the jungles of Burma explore the birth of a new one. Even though Rajkumar cannot believe that one could go into war for wood, it becomes the driving motive that channels the colonial enterprise towards forming roots into a world that they do not understand and yet refuse to acclimatise to. Ghosh juxtaposes Rajkumar and Saya John's determination to become a part of the cultural milieu of the land that they inhabit with the uneasy and often lonely relationship with the self that the colonial machinery develops through its officers who become puppets to their own created roles to delve into the way place influences and often dominates in determining political and social relationships. The story of the death of the colonial officer who refuses to adhere to the customs of the indigenous culture and faces a terrifying death brought about by some sort of supernatural power reiterates the other worldliness of these associations which work in sharp subversion of official ideas of management and ruling. While the supernatural element of the dead mahut coming back from the netherworld to claim his money is a remark on the actual reality of the meagre wages received by the workers and their desperation that leads to such exploitation, it also helps in creating a world view that underscores the dry documentation and rationality driven colonial narratives—the supernatural element becomes an answer to the colonial stock type of the magic trick of the rope and snake charmer, adopting and adapting it to much more sinister forms of exploring the colonized selves. This alienation of the colonial figure is not only expressed in the body and mind of the young British officers but also in the mimic men that they create as their prodigies to help in the establishment of the Empire. Uma's Collector husband become one of the many Indians who are constantly fighting their way into the heart of the Empire, embracing an alienation which gives them a schizoid personality: a sense of superiority assumed from his position as being an intrinsic part of the Empire's machinery and an equally crippling sense of inferiority at the constant fear of being found wanting in completely detaching himself from the surrounding that deems him its own:

He [Uma's husband] had wielded immense power as a District Collector, yet paradoxically, the position had brought him nothing but unease and

uncertainty... There seemed never to be a moment when he was not haunted by the fear of being thought lacking by his British colleagues. And yet it seemed to be universally agreed that he was one of the most successful Indians of his generation; a model for his countrymen. Did that mean that one day all of India would become a shadow of what he had been? Millions of people trying to live their lives in conformity with incomprehensible rules?¹³⁷

Place also becomes a historical marker of political unrest as well as a platform to introspect about ways of subversion and rebellion. While Ratnagiri and its quaint surrounding serve as the place of exile for the Burmese royalty, it is also one that facilitates a deeper understanding of the ideological warfare that the Empire launches, one that controls the mindscape of its subjects through the smallest acts of ridicule, stripping the colonised of even the dignity that remains as his last vestibule of feeling empowered. This is expressed most poignantly through the Queen's refusal to adapt herself as the last stand of rebellion against this inhumane and greedy system:

The Queen greeted them with her proud, thin-lipped smile. Yes, look around you, look at how we live. Yes, we who ruled the richest land in Asia are now reduced to this. This is what they have done to us, this is what they will do to all of Burma. They took our kingdom, promising roads and railways and ports, but mark my words, this is how it will end. In a few decades the wealth will be gone—all the gems, the timber and the oil—and then they too will leave... We were the first to be imprisoned in the name of their progress: millions more will follow. This is what awaits us all: this is how we will all end—as prisoners, in shantytowns born of the plague.¹³⁸

While place in the narrative often becomes a metaphor for the greater political and social questions that the narrative voice ponders on, the confined spaces of the homes and personal extensions like Dinu's studio become the gateway for exploration of familial relationships and how they negotiate with each other in terms of acceptance or rejection of the spaces they inhabit. The castle like structure that is Morningside represents an idyllic place where all notions of friendship and conjugal relationships express themselves in their absolute innocence (for example, Allison needs to leave Morningside with Arjun to go to the beach for her to transgress the lines between flirting and cheating on Dinu, or Ilongo while seen in the

¹³⁷ Amitav Ghosh. *The Glass Palace*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000 pp186-7. Print.

¹³⁸ *Ibid* p88.

forest by Uma becomes a symbol of broken relationships while inside Morningside he is but an extended family member). In the jungles of Burma, as Arjun's regiment face their battles, both inner and outer, it is the physical space of the mess hall in their base that gives them a sense of belonging and a nostalgic point of return for them in the face of the disintegration that threaten them. Similarly, *Lankasuka* stands as a space that forms the base from which and into which all the characters in the novel draw succour from. Introduced to the readers as Uma's paternal home where she goes back after the death of her husband, *Lankasuka* is the rite of passage for characters like Bela who experiences her first tryst with unrequited love, for Manju and Neel to begin their new journey as newly-weds, for Arjun to chart out a new path for himself, for Uma and Rajkumar to begin a relationship of habit at the sunset days of their lives and finally for Jaya, Manju's daughter and her son, the narrator himself, to pick through the cobwebs of memory strewn around in numerous papers and corners of the house to assemble a conglomeration of personal histories which would go on to attach itself to the larger histories of two nations struggling to find their definitions in the world.

Utilitarian Capitalism and the Colonial Enterprise

The British occupation changed everything: Burma had been quickly integrated into the Empire, forcibly converted into a province of British India. Courtly Mandalay was now a bustling commercial hub; resources were being exploited with an energy and efficiency hitherto undreamt of.¹³⁹

The colonial enterprise thrived on this sense of urgent utilitarianism, masking all capitalist greed under the guise of efficiency and betterment. While Ghosh is much more elaborate in his critique of this sham of utilitarianism in the Ibis Trilogy, which has been discussed in detail in chapter 4, in GP he is more restrained in his assessment. Ghosh's narrator explores the colonial system in the text through two main avenues—trade and the armed forces. At the beginning of the narrative, Rajkumar expresses his incredulity stating, 'A war over wood? Who's ever heard of such a thing?' (8)—a sentiment that would go on to define the very nature of the colonial regime. The timber business that Rajkumar takes on with the British companies reiterates the ideas of most gains through minimum investment, couched in the dangerous piety of the rhetoric of the white man's burden. Therefore the native who does partake into this trade needs to conform himself into the set rules made available for him by the enterprise: Rajkumar and Saya John both become Anglicized to partake into the timber

¹³⁹ Ibid. p66.

business. The Empire in the novel is represented through an interconnectedness of exploitative actions and ideas which turns the colonies into mercenaries which were peppered by ‘ghostly men...who fight from neither enmity nor anger, but in submission to orders from superiors, without protest and without conscience’ (30). Ghosh often intertwines the plotlines of the colonial army’s stand-off in Burma with Rajkumar’s exploitative war-time deal of timber, commenting on the multiple facets of this war which even though was playing out the fortunes of distant countries, yet was changing the contours of the lives in the colonies. Much like the shadow lines that the narrator draws in *The Shadow Lines* to understand affinities of places, the war acts as a catalyst to redefine those lines which would now play a role in determining the fate of the colonies as they struggle to come out of the shadow of the Empire and become independent. The narrative also bears testimony to the underlying violence that accompanies the seemingly harmless White Man’s burden. Moving simultaneously between the rhetoric of heroic perseverance peddled by the Empire expressed through Colonel Buckland’s remarks of ‘The truth is that there’s only one reason why England holds on any more—and that is out of a sense of obligation’ (417) , and the reality of the exploitation where the evacuation trains from Burma only have space for the whites and leave behind the rest to be embroiled in a war which is not even theirs, Ghosh’s narrator deconstructs the charade of humanity and civilization that the Empire clothed its commercial greed with. Ghosh while speaking about the colonial involvement in the War states the extent to which the indoctrination of the Empire shaped the mental map of the colonized: ‘There was no need for the Indians in Burma to flee when the Japanese approached...It makes you realise the degree to which Indians felt themselves to be the sheep of the British; the delusions that governed their lives’¹⁴⁰. However, Ghosh is equally sceptical of the nascent stages of the independence movement as he explores the confusion that comes in trying to visualise a worldview which does not have the omnipresence of the Empire as the only guiding light. This dilemma and crisis is best captured through Arjun’s final words to Dinu where he argues the necessity of self-destruction to even start realising a new destiny for the ones like him: ‘Did we ever have hope?...We rebelled against an Empire that has shaped everything in our lives; coloured everything in the world as we know it. it is a huge, indelible stain which has tainted all of us—We cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves’¹⁴¹.

¹⁴⁰ Amitav Ghosh. ‘Coming Under Burmese Fire Was Surreal’. Interview. *Outlook Magazine*. (July 2000). Accessed on 2016. <http://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/coming-under-burmese-fire-was-surreal/209696>. Web.16.04.2016

¹⁴¹ Amitav Ghosh. *The Glass Palace*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000 p518. Print.

The Army as the first point of the national awakening of the colonies

The Army played out as the first arena of both the indoctrination as well as the revolt against that indoctrination of the colonial ethos. While in Ibis Trilogy Ghosh examines the structure of the armed forces in the colonial regime and its effect on the Indian soldiers in much greater detail, the nascent stages of that research finds its way in his exploration of the character of Arjun and his dilemma, which is a reflection of the greater sentiment of the nationalist thought. Arjun performs the condition of a crisis of identity that comes with fighting back a history that is all encompassing. At one point in the narrative, Rajkumar, while showing Uma the vast timber empire that he had built confesses how irrespective of the hold he has over it, the whole machinery still rebels against those very forces that had made them: ‘But it’s when you try to make the whole machine work that you discover that every bit of it is fighting back’ (233). This ‘fighting back’ is the ethos that Arjun and the rest of the Indian soldiers represent. While they fight for a machinery which never considers them equal, their minds slowly start fighting back to the injustice of it:

It was strange to be sitting on one side of a battle line, knowing that you had to fight and knowing at the same time that it wasn’t really your fight—knowing that whether you won or lost, neither the blame nor the credit would be yours. Knowing that you are risking everything to defend a way of life that pushes you to the sidelines. It’s almost as if you are fighting against yourself. It’s strange to be sitting in a trench, holding a gun and asking yourself: who is this weapon really aimed at? Am I being tricked into pointing it at myself?¹⁴²

It is interesting that the uneducated Kishan Singh is more aware of the ludicrous nature of their position than the officers themselves. Singh has no illusion about the job that he is entrusted with—one which allows him to feed his family. He does not need the deception of the made-up self that the officers delude themselves with—those of equality, honour and bravery. The conceived selves of the officers, ‘their assessments were so exaggerated that they seemed to be inventing versions of themselves for collective consumption’ (278), help in continuing their sense of being more than bonded slaves to the whims of their colonial masters. It is their version of the ‘*laxman-rekha*’, one that keeps them from achieving a dangerous sense of selfhood which would break down the sham that they have been enacting. However, in moments of extreme self-realisation, when the headiness of deluding oneself that

¹⁴² Ibid. p406.

one is living an equal life wears of in the face of the reality of inequality, the officers do realise their position as ghost-men of an army that sees them nothing more than collaterals. This is most poignantly brought out in the conversation between Manju and Arjun where she forces him to reflect on his position as he remarks, ‘On the surface everything in the army appears to be ruled by manuals, regulations, procedures; it seems very cut and dried. But actually, underneath there are all these murky shadows that you can never quite see: prejudice, distrust, suspicion’ (284-5). While the beginning of the War finds the officers like Arjun eager to prove themselves as loyalists to the Empire, it soon turns out to be a study in their own position in the scheme of the colonial power structure and their awareness of their fragility against a system that shuttles them like a pendulum between the two extremes of loyalty and self-preservation.

The Army also becomes a microcosm of the greater problem that the Empire faces. The despair and disappointment that Lieutenant Colonel Buckland feels at the ambush on his regiment by the Japanese army becomes a foreshadowing of the waning power of the Empire over the reality of its colonies. The lack of preparedness of the regiment brings to light the gaping hole in their knowledge of the enemy—a lack of knowledge brought about by a sense of invincibility that the Empire has boasted on, an Empire which in its superiority dooms itself to its destruction.

Family as the antistory to the officialdom of History

...Two of my novels (The Shadow Lines, and my most recent The Glass Palace) are centred on families. I know that for myself this is a way of displacing the ‘nation’...in other words, I’d like to suggest that writing about families is one way of not writing about the nation (or other restrictively imagined communities).¹⁴³

Ghosh’s GP contests the fixity that is often attributed to familial structures and instead opens them to forces that keeps them continuously in a state of flux. GP is both about one family and about an amalgamation of multiple families, each living out a shared history in their different capacities. They exist at a site of breaking down and rearranging of those fragments against the currents of a greater historical narrative of breaking and remaking of nations. While on face-value, GP follows the stories of three family structures—Dolly and Rajkumar, Uma and her family in *Lankasuka* and Mathew and Elisa’s family in Morningside, on delving

¹⁴³ Amitav Ghosh & Dipesh Chakrabarty. ‘A Correspondence on Provincializing Europe’. *Radical History Review* Vol. 83 (2002)p. 147. Web.

deeper one realises how each of these narratives converge into a maze that is only partly untangled in retrospect through the eyes of a future, represented through the author-narrator, which stands at a distance and can draw out the patterns of familiarity. GP focuses on the concept of defeat and how that works as a structuring principle in the gathering of exiles into a moment of similarity, that of the family:

Gathering of exiles and émigrés and refugees; ‘gathering’ on the edge of ‘foreign’ cultures; gathering at the frontiers; gathering in the ghettos or cafes of city centres; gathering in the half-life; half-light of foreign tongues, or in the uncanny fluency of another’s language, gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees and discourses, disciplines; gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds lived retroactively; gathering the past in a ritual of revival; gathering the present.¹⁴⁴

The family therefore becomes a moment of a ritual of remembrance, much like the novel penned down by the author-narrator, a ritual that underscores the performance of the other imagined community, that of the nation. Undercutting the principle of a pure and authentic cultural identity that became the defining principle of the concept of nationhood, the family gives a space for the non-normative to still find a place of belonging, where the antithetical can con-exist caught up in ties of shared pasts, momentarily escaping from the tyranny of the present. Dinu, in one of his rare moments of expression remarks to Jaya the violence that marks entrance of the public into the private:

...that while misrule and tyranny must be resisted, so too must politics itself...that it cannot be allowed to cannibalise all of life, all of existence. To me this is the most terrible indignity of our condition—not just in Burma, but in many other places too...that politics has invaded everything, spared nothing...religion, art, family...it has taken over everything...there is no escape from it...and yet, what could be more trivial, in the end?¹⁴⁵

It is the unit of the family and its disparate yet accumulative structure that remains as the only answer to the onslaught of the politics of place and identity. Each of the characters somehow crawl their way back into the womb of the family—Arjun through Dinu’s memory of him, Manju and Neel through their daughter Jaya, Rajkumar and Dolly through the Long March to name a few, to reinvigorate themselves to fight the battle for survival. It is the family

¹⁴⁴ Homi Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, (1994) p139. Print.

¹⁴⁵ Amitav Ghosh. *The Glass Palace*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers, (2000) p542. Print.

structure that survives the onslaught of a History that bases itself on the policing of identities by the modern nation-state to re-configure itself to confirm a particular normative and homogenous vision of the past. It functions as the *antistory* that recognises the urgency of remembering the stories that have not been documented, of voices that have lost the power to make themselves heard over the din of national fervour, against the aesthetic of indifference that forms the governing principle of History.

Working against this overwhelming sense of indifference, the figure of the author-narrator stands not only as a selector of histories which need to be told, but also of ones which need to be forgotten. One of the main criticisms against GP has been its overt dependence on coincidence in bringing together the different strands into one conglomerate whole. As Rukmini Bhaya Nair opines in her essay ‘The Road from Mandalay: Reflections on Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*’, coincidence becomes a major player in the worlds that Ghosh’s narrator creates, tying up ends to an extent where one might find it almost incredulous. Ghosh’s historian-anthropologist narrator realises the anomaly of such a narrative device, yet he also indulges in it as a statement of protest against the fragmented narratives that are often the staple of the postcolonial narrative. The incredulity of the wholesomeness that the narrative boasts of is an act of subversion that lies at the heart of this magnanimous tale of families caught up in the drama of nationhood. To forget one needs to remember, a remembering that is defiant, angry and rebellious, one that ‘hadn’t gone without striking back’ (456): it is this remembering that the narrator gives precedent to, even at the risk of its own disintegration. The narrator therefore chooses to remember an interconnectedness rather than a fragmentation caused by distances, silences and gaps in memory to ‘brim over from the measuring cup of reality into an ocean of dreams’ (483).

Conclusion

...the same history does not create the same individual, and that is what is interesting about it. History remains at the background, but hundred different individuals exist living the history in their own ways.¹⁴⁶

Ghosh in CC, HT and GP explore different ways in which histories are negotiated by individual lives working from the peripheries of the narrative of the normative History.

¹⁴⁶ Amitav Ghosh. Mentioned in Sajal Kumar Bhattacharya. ‘ ”Live My Prince; Hold on to your Life”: Issues of Transnational life and Identity in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*’. Eds. Tapan Kumar Ghosh & Prasanta Bhattacharya. *In Pursuit Of Amitav Ghosh: Some Recent Readings*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2013 p. 143. Print.

Postcolonial narratives have always dealt with the politics of absence: absence of an 'other' which remains in the realms of silence. Ghosh in all three novels tries to engage with this absent figure of the 'other', giving it a language that even though inadequate at many instances, still does a better job than the arbitrary absence that often defines them. Ghosh in these narratives often brings in the public within the purview of the private to show how personal histories are often triggered by public ones. Does Ghosh succeed in breaking the barrier of expression that guards these alternate narratives? It is a question which has no easy answer. While at various moments in the relaying of narratives of the past, Ghosh and his narrators get caught up in the very traps that they had sought to avoid, they still achieve a success of sorts in the way they illuminate pasts which are standing on the precipice of complete disappearance. These are pasts which have moved to the realm of the Immemorial, refusing to participate in the constricted visions of the archiving project. Therefore, as a writer, Ghosh starts from a position of disadvantage in trying to bring them into the purview of the historical. However, 'at a time of millennial doom, when we are having to radically reconfigure our dimly remembered pasts in order to understand their effects on our chaotically disturbed present'¹⁴⁷, Ghosh's triumph lay in representing worlds which give us clues into alternate forms of thinking and definitions, moving away from the strenuous burden of collective History to the ever changing, resisting classifications, amalgamating the extremes of remembering and forgetting, an ahistorical *antistory* that would liberate us from our own tortured identities that have formed the tired-out definition of the postcolonial self.

¹⁴⁷ Rukmini Bhaya Nair. 'Road from Mandalay: Reflections on Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*'. Ed. Tabish Khair. *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003 p. 174. Print.

Chapter 4

Historicizing the Unhistorical: *The Sea of Poppies*, *The River of Smoke* and *The Flood of Fire*

One of the enduring ideas that Ghosh has returned to in his deliberation with South Asian history has been the mythmaking quality of the colonial enterprise and the condition of its perennality in the face of the changing contours of comprehension about the Empire. In the three parts of the *Ibis* trilogy, Ghosh moves away from the dichotomous nature of the postcolonial understanding of the colonial narrative and instead tries to unfurl it from a point of time in the past from whence forth springs the eternal story telling of the colonial light triumphing over the darkness of the 'Other', an Other which is understood in terms of race, temperament and space. If one observes the rhetorical quality of colonial history, one is obligated to take note of the prominence of dates as well as the looming sense of premonition that marks all such narratives. 'Databilty' has been the foundational trope for the grounding of colonial narratives within the contours of legitimacy as well as the moral foregrounding for its ascendance to power. To date an event is to endow it with the significance of being part of the chronological rendering of history, a precedence and prominence in the final and cumulative outcome of conflict and ideological control. Ranajit Guha elucidates this further as he mulls over the importance of the date of the battle of Plassey in the determination of the basis of colonial rule in Bengal and then the rest of India:

Of course, not all of what is datable is written up as history. But that does not take away from the truth of its temporal constitution. It only goes to show how little the demand of historicity is met by historiography. The intentionalities and ideologies which guide the latter in its selective strategies are as much a measure of this inadequacy as they are its instruments. They make it possible and, thanks to an almost universally statist bias, necessary that the story of a marriage ruined by dowry or of a farm ruined by floods finds no place in history, but that the battle of Plassey does. And even for that battle it is selectivity which endows it at once with the glory of past triumphs and the promise of more to come. The ruse of a colonialist writing seems to

have manipulated the datability of a relatively minor conflict to foretell the conquest of an entire subcontinent.¹⁴⁸

Guha here not only questions the rationale behind the elevation of an historically unimportant battle to being the authoritative point of *peripetia* for the East India company, he also brings to focus the modes of narratives that such an elevation utilises and how that fits into the overall chronicle of the White Man's discovery of the dark annals of the disenfranchised other. The question of datability does not therefore, merely put an event within the sequential chain of the larger ideology, it also adds a retrospective prophesying that legitimizes the future through a revaluation of the past, bringing in fate and premonition as the foretellers of the expansion of the empire. 'What enables us to speak of empire and fate together in this context is that both are distinguished by a certain traffic between past and future in such a way as to make their trajectories intersect occasionally in history.'¹⁴⁹ The foretelling of the expansion of the empire also bring along with it the creation of the figure of the falsified pioneer, the white man who becomes vested with the powers of not only an enterprising discoverer but one who carries within himself the burden of his own civilizing background that propels him to a lifetime of discovering, enlightening and humanizing the unknowable other.

If one makes a study of the different colonial narratives that sprout out during the breadth of the colonial enterprise as well as ones that came in the wake of its demise, a carefully drawn distinction can be made between the ideational and the practical versions of these narratives. While the ideational is often looked at as the fountainhead of the practical action, one can see that what praxis represents is but a shadow of the cult-like quality of the notion and the hypothesis of the empire. While a lot has been said about the 'unselfish' nature as well as the civilizing burden of the colonial work, what have often been glossed over are the actual parameters that define the supposed unselfish nature of the course. The colonial mission is not merely a selfless pretension-less act of conquering, it is an ideal with is set up in whose altar the colonizer bows and offers his self as the sacrifice. This is an act that demands an initial elevation of the self, from whence it can now lower itself in the grand sacrifice for an idea that is bigger than the mere ego. Therefore, as one can gauge from the rhetoric, conquest or colonial action becomes much more than a solely political achievement, it rather elevates

¹⁴⁸ Ranajit Guha. 'A Conquest Foretold'. *The Small Voice of History: Collected Essays*. Ed. Partha Chatterjee. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009, p378. Print.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p380

itself to a spiritual encounter that requires a complete surrender of the self. What is intriguing about this surrender is that it is ironically a surrendering into the same rhetoric of the prominence and precedence of the ‘formed’ colonial self over the unknown and therefore the one to be worked with the colonized other. One of the enduring tales of the colonizer’s tale of the unknowable other, *Heart of Darkness*, rests on this spiritual fanaticism of exploring and configuring the ‘Dark’ other where the individual’s story of triumph becomes the microcosm of the greater work of the empire. The maverick’s dream entwines with the fate of empires and the commonwealth forming a grand and aggrandizing idealization that legitimizes all forms violence within the rhetoric of greater good: ‘...the sword—more often than not an instrument of senseless murder used against the conquered—acquires the dignity of an envoy sent out by the conquering state, and the torch—more often than not the cause of that smoke from burning villages...becomes the bearer of “a spark of the sacred fire.”’¹⁵⁰ This moralistic and spiritual memorializing of the secular and more often than not sinister acts of conquest allow colonial history to not be bound to factuality but rather mould itself in the hues of destiny and fate, one that is vested with the timelessness of a known present and future rather than a calculative effort of occupying and conquering.

The rhetoric associated with this idealization is one that further advances the colonial project as part of ‘keeping the order’. Guha illustrates this further as he states,

To regard such idealization as nostalgia would be to drain it of all significance. Its function is not to bring about a recurrence of the past and its achievements, but to go back into the possibility of what has been there and repeat it for future projects which are an individual’s or generation’s own. The past does not come into such repetition as time gone dead but rather as something handed down as a living heritage, strong in its knowledge of the possibility of what has been. In repetition the latter makes itself available to that other possibility—the possibility of what is to come—for adoption in projects which critically affirm as well as disavow it for the future...History and fate, past and future interpenetrate thus in the narrative of all that has been and will be.¹⁵¹

While the colonial chronicles imbued themselves with the sacral notions of discovery, fate and destiny, what they actively seceded from was an account of the colonized other. The colonized other, in spite of the repeated nature of the colonial narratives, always remain in

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. p-385

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p386

dark, the eyes glowing in the bush, the speakers of unfathomable languages, caught in the vicious cycle of performing their selves as inscrutable and therefore needing to be obliterated. The uncomprehending alienation of the colonized and the colonizer becomes the fodder for the perennial existence of the empire and the legitimization of the White Man's burden. Even though in theory, the colonial enterprise was a time-bound project of training the colonized into the ways of subjecthood that would help them in maintaining modern empires unto themselves, in praxis it was an ever receding deference of such training, validated under the garb of incomprehensibility, the colonized as an ancient language whose code was irrevocably lost thus opening up a deep chasm between the unknown jungle and the known metropolis of the colonizer. This chasm must forever remain unbridgeable for the colonial enterprise to flourish and the story of the other side continue to be inaccessible. This chasm is further mutated into colonialism's obsessive relationship with genealogy, the innumerable documents that trace the history of colonial families within the subcontinent remain testimony to it, an obsession that legitimises control as well as the continuance of such modes of power.

The discursive impact of colonial narratives did not limit itself to being the documentation required for the validation of the various nodes of colonial power in the subcontinent, rather its main effect and offspring has been the culture of mourning that it has vested upon the consciousness of the multitudes whose voices were never heard, the trauma of whose obliteration becomes the fodder for the postcolonial nationalist saga to base itself on.

Postcoloniality and its narrative hinge not only on the endemic mourning of loss of the other, rather it becomes one which in the face of such a lack reinterprets history in an artificial simulation of European history, ironically taking fodder from those very theoretical paradigms which have over centuries invalidated postcolonial worlds' as well as their knowledge systems' very existence. It is often curious to note that postcolonial historiography and its companion narratives become variations of the master narrative of Europe, where the West (Europe and its civilizational history) becomes both the touchstone and the silent referent in historical knowledge. There are two problems that emanate from such an act which in turn become the stepping stones for a new sort of history to be construed. The first problem that occurs in such historical knowledge is the asymmetric nature of ignorance that presides over our/ postcolonial's understanding of history. This asymmetric ignorance is reflected in the fact that while Europe/West are allowed as well as revel in writing and creating history with no need or desire to include the Third world or its

knowledge systems in such creations, such an act on the part of the Third world would be construed as ignorance and seen as a legitimate reason for it to be termed ‘uncivilized’. Secondly, even in cases where European and Third world histories are mentioned together, there is a sense of specificity that pervades over European points of reference, for example exacts texts, ages, time spans, whereas the other histories are glossed and conglomerated under the generic terms of legends, myths and non-scientific modes of knowledge. Dipesh Chakrabarty expounds this further:

For generations now, philosophers and thinkers shaping the nature of social science have produced theories embracing the entirety of humanity. As we well know, these statements have been produced in relative, and sometimes absolute ignorance of the majority of humankind—i.e, those living in non-Western cultures. This in itself is not paradoxical, for the more self-conscious of European philosophers have always sought theoretically to justify this stance. There everyday paradox of third-world social science is that *we* find these theories, in spite of their inherent ignorance of ‘us’, eminently useful in understanding our societies. What allowed the modern European sages to develop such clairvoyance with regard to societies of which they were empirically ignorant? Why cannot we, once again, return the gaze?¹⁵² (emphasis in original)

Keeping Europe as the ‘knowable’ and therefore the universal touchstone, all postcolonial narratives have hinged themselves on a saga of lack, of failure, and forever inadequate, even if contained within the hallowed walls of the ‘modern’. It is an accumulation of known history, which performs itself time and again to validate itself as the only way of writing and creating histories of the Third world, of the postcolonial self. Caught up in the vicious cycle of reproducing what Meaghan Morris terms as ‘the project of positive unoriginality’ the postcolonial subject is split in a double movement:

...of recognition by which it both knows its ‘present’ as the site of disorder and yet moves away from this space in desiring a discipline that can only exist in an imagined but ‘historical’ future,...A historical construction of temporality (medieval/modern, separated by historical time), in other words, is precisely the axis along which the

¹⁵² Dipesh Chakrabarty. ‘Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for “Indian” Pasts?’ *Representations*, No. 37, Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories (Winter, 1992), p3. Web. 22.08.2015.

colonial subject splits itself. Or to put it differently, this split *is* what is history; *writing history is performing this split over and over again.*¹⁵³ (Own emphasis)

The performing of the split represents itself in the dual and often contrasting narratives of the elite urban Indian and the other non-elite who even though physically belong to the nation space yet remain conspicuously absent in determining its features and its contours. The assumed unity called the 'Indian people' is always already split into two: the metropolitan and the subaltern. Yet interestingly both these contesting identities are forcefully brought under the metanarrative of the nation state which mimics the standards set by the hyperreal Europe. Constituted through the modernizing narratives of citizenship, nation state, evidential understanding of the past, Third world History therefore obliterates the various histories that reside beyond the scope of the rationalizing, linear and exclusive annals of the institutional practices of history making. The peasant, the worker, the subaltern and their antihistorical and antimodern histories remain as footnotes buried deep within the aggrandizing universality of the nation state which becomes the hallmark of the modern political community. Postcolonial Indian history thus becomes a mimicked history, a history of omissions and a history still trying to define itself in terms of inadequacy. 'Indian history, even in the most dedicated socialist or nationalist hands, remains a mimicry of a certain "modern" subject of "European" history and is bound to represent a sad figure of lack and failure. The transition narrative will always remain "grievously incomplete"'.¹⁵⁴

The need to revive these subaltern ahistorical narratives has been the main focus of subaltern studies since the 1980s. There has been an effort to what Chakrabarty would call as 'provincializing Europe' which would by extension mean the displacing of Europe as the hyperreal centre of postcolonial narratives and a renewed focus on the peripheral subjectivities that become the point the intrigue for the new understanding of the nation and its politics. In view of this, what was required was an overhauling of the historical project, displacing it from the institutional vacuum of theoretical studies and an active reorientation of it into a new kind of ethos that exposes itself self-reflexively in all its decisions, omissions, ideological choices and the violence associated with such acts. The idea was to write into history the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force and the tragedies and ironies all of which that come to define it. It is necessary for such a project to relentlessly seek out the connections between idealism and violence that lies at the heart of the totalizing concepts of

¹⁵³ Ibid. p13.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p18

citizenship and modernity. Chakrabarty elucidates this further, a point that Amitav Ghosh takes on in his novels, specifically *The Glass Palace*, and the *Ibis* Trilogy:

...a history that deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices, the part it plays in collusion with the narratives of citizens in assimilating to the projects of the modern state all other possibilities of human solidarity. The politics of despair will require of such history that it lays bare to its readers the reasons why such a predicament is necessarily inescapable. This is a history that will attempt the impossible: to look forward toward its own death by tracing that which resists and escapes the best human effort at translation across cultural and other semiotic systems, so that the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous...[it is to attempt to] see the modern as inevitably contested, to write over the given and privileged narratives of citizenship other narratives of human connections that draw sustenance from dreamed-up pasts and futures where collectivities are defined neither by the rituals of citizenship nor by the nightmare of “tradition” that “modernity” creates.¹⁵⁵

Amitav Ghosh as evinced in the earlier chapters has been singularly focussed on the altering of the historical project, breaking its edified structures and opening it up to the claims of the past whose very forgetting has been forgotten. In various interviews, the most famous of them being his correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty over the connotations of a project to ‘provincialize’ Europe and its effect on our understanding of the nation state, Ghosh has stressed upon the need to visualize history from the telescopic end of the family structure as the family remains the only collective that can challenge the larger imaginary collective of the nation. He states ‘Two of my novels (*The Shadow Lines*, and my most recent, *The Glass Palace*) are centred on families. I know that for myself this is a way of displacing the ‘nation’—I am sure that this is the case also with many Indian writers other than myself. In other words, I’d like to suggest that writing about families is one way of not writing about the nation (or other restrictively imagined collectivities)’¹⁵⁶. Even though this foregrounding of the family structure is seen throughout his earlier works, it gains its most nuanced reading in *The Glass Palace* as seen in the earlier chapter. The reason this chapter aims to take up the three parts of the *Ibis* Trilogy together for an analysis of Ghosh’s changing politics as an

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p22-3

¹⁵⁶ Amitav Ghosh, Dipesh Chakrabarty. ‘A Correspondence on Provincializing Europe’. *Radical History Review*, Issue 83, (Spring 2002), p 147. Web. 22.08.2015.

author and the effect of such changes in his overall project of ahistorical history (what I choose to call as *antistory*) is not only the superficial similarity among the works in terms of the dates and periods that they are set in. Rather, what binds these narratives together are the experiments that Ghosh revels in in the way that they represent the different structures of human bonding that goes on to question as well as deconstruct the notions of family and belonging. Secondly, the Trilogy takes up from the notion of counter history that has been the mainstay in many of earlier works and goes on to further complicate it by utilising historical documents as modes of destabilization and the consequent effect on academic history through such acts of subversion. This chapter will first attempt analysis of the three different novels taking them as individual cases of study and then through an overall bringing together of the various strands and issues that connect as well as disconnect these texts with each other, it will comment on the role of Ghosh in terms of both a fiction author as well as an anthropologist and the political, historical as well as ethical connotations of his new techniques of representing history through the lens of fiction.

Sea of Poppies

While talking about *Sea of Poppies*, Antoinette Burton had commented, ‘Like *The Glass Palace* and *Hungry Tide* before it, *Sea of Poppies* is about recasting the geographies of ‘India’ by interrupting the boundary markers that have arbitrarily carved up the sub-continent and by using ocean worlds as ecumenes. Ghosh’s ecumenes are raucously inhabited, fully-embodied worlds through which characters hurtle, and in so doing, shape the territorial limits and possibilities of the landscapes they traverse.’¹⁵⁷ Following the contours of his earlier forays into subaltern histories, Ghosh in *Sea of Poppies* brings together contrasting and competing accounts of fragments of historical experiences which are in danger of being lost to the demands of arbitrary and orthodox recording of the historical moment. Ghosh’s novel tries to capture the ‘poetics of history from below’ and through that comprehend the power politics that shape these narratives.

Sea of Poppies begins as the first part of a trilogy, revealing as much as concealing the different hues of its overall structure. Encompassing within itself the myriad threads that would transform into the webs of characters as well as plot points that are hurtling towards what Nono Kissin Baboo would name as ‘*pralay*’ or the end of the civilization as one

¹⁵⁷ Antoinette Burton. ‘Amitav Ghosh’s World Histories From Below’, *History of the Present*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring 2012), p 74. PDF

comprehends it, Ghosh stratifies his narrative in a form where there is a constant reverting to that one point of historicity that contains the germs of it, albeit in its most nebulous form: Deeti's shrine. Deeti's shrine with its metonymic representations of the main proponents of the action, serves as a talisman to the rest of the journey that each of the characters will undertake, a shrine that is both stringent in its explanations as well as evocative of the histories that it conceals within itself. The shrine, which becomes as important a protagonist as the Ibis would, remains in transit, in a state of perpetual unbelonging as it moves with Deeti from her small hut in Ghazipur, to the dim inner walls of the blackbird Ibis, and finally in the hidden walls of the cave in Malaysia. This act of movement becomes a subversion of the immovability of the archive that remains vested in a singular place, edifying itself into a permanence that we know as History.

Sea of Poppies presents a transnational narrative wherein Ghosh poses the critical questions of boundaries and transgression, identity politics which becomes intrinsically laced with politics of space and geographies. Building itself as a map of colonial power equations and their effect on the disparate conglomerations of characters, Ghosh's novel converges the worlds of 'land' and 'river' into the final limitlessness of the 'sea', the Indian Ocean¹⁵⁸. It is an interesting fact that Ghosh stresses upon at the beginning of the novel where he charts out the history of the Ibis which will become one of the mainstays of the journey ahead:

One thing that Zachary did know about the Ibis was that she had been built to serve as a 'black-birder', for transporting slaves. This indeed, was the reason why she had changed hands; in the years since the formal abolition of the slave trade, British and American naval vessels had taken to patrolling the West African coast in growing numbers,...As with many another slave-ship, the schooner's new owner had acquired her with an eye to fitting her for a different trade: the export of opium.¹⁵⁹

This crucial piece of information becomes the starting piece of the bigger puzzle that Ghosh is trying to build. It serves two crucial purposes: first it serves as initial evidence to the readers about Zachary's own history of being linked to the slave trade, secondly it serves as a premonition to the actual curve that the story will take, the movement from one form of exploitative trade of humans to a more nuanced exploitation of the conquering of nations

¹⁵⁸ The novel is divided into three parts named as 'land', 'river' and 'sea'. Each of these sections represent the moving of the characters from the familiarity of land, into the dregs of the Ganga river as they wait for their destinies to act out in unknowable ways and finally into the vast recesses of the Indian Ocean as they make the treacherous journey over the Black Waters to reach Mahachin and its surrounding islands.

¹⁵⁹ Amitav Ghosh. *Sea of Poppies*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2008 p 11. Print.

through an opiate that enslaves. The Ibis' history therefore performs as the spring board from which the narrator takes on the leap to unravel the multitude forces that work in tandem towards a different form of enslavement.

Trade and commerce as removed from the overall aspect of the cultural and national questions has been advocated by the proponents of Free Trade throughout the three parts of Trilogy. Ghosh in his trilogy clearly demarcates a structure of presenting the effect of the opium and its trade on the subcontinent. Like the eye of the cyclone that remains constant while all around it destruction ensues, opium in this novel begins as much as a character that begins as a small malignant cell within the unit of the family, before it spreads to a community and then finally in *Flood of Fire* goes on to destroy nations. However, in this first part, its effect are merely seen in its most infantile stage—through the two addict figures of Deeti's husband Hukam Singh and the incarcerated Ah Fatt. Both of them are seen as the dregs of the human society who have been cast out from normative society as failures—one a failed soldier who had only his pride to hold on to him, and the other the bastard child of a businessman who fails to claim a place in his world. While the opium trade is presented by the Company as 'god's work' with slogans like 'Jesus Christ is Free Trade and Free Trade is Jesus Christ'¹⁶⁰ which converged the missionary and mercantile aspects of the Company, the personal histories of these subaltern figures like Hukam Singh stand as a sharp reminder of the fine print that such sloganeering very conspicuously hid. Ghosh further reasserts this other side of the opium story through the factory that lay on the shores of Ganga in the non-descript village of Ghazipur. Ghazipur, as history knows it, is a small township in Varanasi district that prides itself in being known for production of *gulab jal* as well as being the tomb site of Lord Cornwallis. It is also famous for being the home of the largest opium factory in Asia, 'Government Opium and Alkaloid works'. Ghosh goes beyond the tourist guide factoids of the factory, instead takes his readers into the inner chambers which are most often barred for the outside world. Ironically this opportunity comes through the character of Deeti who is permitted the visit after her husband Hukam Singh collapses within the factory during his work hours, allowing her as well as the readers a view of a world that lies far removed from the green fields that surround the factory:

...it was like a dim tunnel, lit only by a few small holes in the wall. The air inside was hot and fetid, like that of a closed kitchen, except that the smell was not of spices and

¹⁶⁰ Amitav Ghosh. *Sea of Poppies*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2008 p 116. Print.

oil, but of liquid opium, mixed with the dull stench of sweat—a reek so powerful that she had to pinch her nose to keep herself from gagging. No sooner had she steadied herself, that her eyes were met with a startling sight—a host of dark, legless torsos was circling around and around, like some enslaved tribe of demons... When her eyes had grown more accustomed to the gloom, she discovered the secret of those circling torsos: they were bare-bodied men, sunk waist-deep in the tanks of opium, tramping round and round to soften the sludge. Their eyes were vacant, glazed... their eyes glowed red in the dark and they appeared completely naked, their loincloths—if indeed they had any—being so steeped in the drug as to be indistinguishable from their skin.¹⁶¹

The mixing room with its ghoulish workers embody the sordid truth of the trade that were sanitized off by the time it reached the discussion chambers of the traders. The seeping of the opium into the skin of the workers becomes symbolic of the purgatory nature of the drug and its power to reach the inner sanctums of human life and render it useless. This sense of helplessness, the ‘legless torsos’ that are engaged in the eternal Sisyphean struggle of churning out a drug that they have no control or stake over, is further encapsulated through the vulnerability of the farmers who are forced to engage in the trade by growing poppy plants, often caught up in a bind by the Company sahibs. The opium trade acting as both the within and the without of the destructive cyclonic forces that finds its culmination in the flood of sludge that Bahram sails over in the *River of Smoke*, opens up a new side of the public space in the novel, the space of the bonded and the free, the space of the ideological and the mercantile, the space of the *girmitiya* and the lascar, the sahib and the pirate.

Sea of Poppies surrounds itself with characters who often stand as contrasting representations of not only their counterparts but many a times of their own history as well. In the exposition of each of the characters, Ghosh invests a lot of time in their immediate surrounding and supporting figures who stand as the different sides of the central figure. Therefore, while a Chandan Singh and Deeti’s husband as well as her daughter Kabutri become points of reference to comprehend the different shades of Deeti, Elokeshi, Parimal, Neel’s wife as well as his son Raj Rattan become testimonies of the multiple roles that Neel simultaneously plays while being the Raja of Rashakhali. Each of these sub-worlds of the characters that form the ‘Land’ section of the novel function not only as establishing a foundation for the growth of

¹⁶¹ Amitav Ghosh. *Sea of Poppies*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2008 p 94-5. Print.

the characters but also bear testimony to the miscellaneous nature of the stake holders in the opium trade.

The opium trade working as the point of convergence for the Company and the zamindars, lay as the aortal link that formed the basis of the Company's skilful manipulation of the zamindars and their acute understanding of the gap that lay between the zamindar and his zamindary. While Ghosh postulates how the Empire became the stage for revival of fortunes as well as self fashioning for the British officials (Burnham's trajectory from being a tradesman's son to a Sahib within the contours of the newly acquired Empire), he is also keenly critical of the disinterest of the Indian counterparts with their own lands. Neel's father's wilful disregard for understanding the actual nature of Burnham's business, Neel's inability of comprehend the gravity of his role as the ruler of Rashakhali and the subsequent breakdown of his estate as he is incarcerated for forgery and its final passing off into the Company hands remain the foci from which emanates the '*pralay*' that the colonial rule would spell for the subcontinent as well as the other parts of the Empire. The ideological ivory towers that the rajas entrapped themselves in, similar to the Manchu rulers that *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire* chronicle becomes the chink in the shield that the Company requires for the furthering of its own fortunes.

Ghosh models *Sea of Poppies* as a marketplace of contesting and contrasting identity politics, all of whom are driven by the basal instincts of survival, submitting their selves at the threshold of the capitalist dream. Standing at the two extremes of this mixing pit of identities are the girmityas and the lascars, both complementing each other in pushing forth the opium trade and yet constantly acting as points of reminders of the ethical questions of freedom, individual will, social and communal responsibility.

The road was filled with people...hemmed in by a ring of stick-bearing guards, this crowd was trudging wearily in the direction of the river. Bundles of belonging sat balanced on their heads and shoulders, and brass pots hung suspended from their elbows. It was clear that they had already marched a great distance, for their dhotis, langots and vests were stained with the dust of the road...although she [Deeti] had never seen a girmitya before, she had heard them being spoken of. They were so called because, in exchange of money, their names were entered on 'girmits' –agreements written on piece

of paper. The silver that was paid for them went to their families, and they were taken away, never to be seen again: they vanished, as if into the netherworld.¹⁶²

[The lascars] came from places that were far apart, and had nothing in common, except the Indian Ocean; among them were Chinese and East Africans, Arabs and Malays, Bengalis and Goans...they came in groups of ten or fifteen, each with a leader who spoke on their behalf. To break up these groups was impossible; they had to be taken together or not at all, and although they came cheap, they had their own ideas of how much work they would do and how many men would share each job¹⁶³

The descriptions of these two work groups open up the discussion to different modes of work as well as play up the sharp disparity that moulds the nature of the lascar and the girmitiya. For the girmitiyas, it is a future that is already closed off with the past; quite akin to the slave trade, bonded and indentured labour in the Empire formed the workforce for many of the plantations. These workers were often caught up in the vicious cycle of debt arising out of the forceful crop plantation routines that they were subjected to by their landlords or by the British officials and this indebtedness often led them offer themselves as collaterals to secure the future of their families. It is however, an interesting study when one contrasts the causality that lay behind the acceptance of such a fate on lines of gender subject positions. While for the men girmitiyas, the indenture is a direct reflection of their monetary status or their caste status within the social setup that they hail from, and therefore their relations as well as interactions with each other are determined by utility as well as caste positions, the women girmitiyas represent the other aspect of the politic. Amidst the 'urgent intimacy'¹⁶⁴ of the secluded portion of the pulwar that the women inhabited, the stories of their past created a new bond of their shared history of being an outsider to their own fates. However, none of them restrict themselves by wedding themselves to the stories handed down to them. As they reiterate the stories of their pasts, more often they embellish them with details that make them stronger and deciding agents of their own narratives. So, while a Deeti invents a love story of her and Kalua's relationship beginning at the childish age of twelve, Munia refuses to cower down to her dismal past of being raped by a pykar agent and bearing his child who is killed off along with her parents by the agent's goons; she conceives herself in a new avatar as a

¹⁶² Ibid.p 70-2. Print.

¹⁶³ Ibid. p13. Print.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. p241. Print.

woman who has the agency to seek her own future as she goes in search of her brothers in Mauritius. The women's stories of their origins stand in mutiny against the streamlined histories of the girmitiyas' pasts that are often hued in the self-same pitiful narrative of vicious poverty. Their stories resonate with a sense of defiance, a sliver of hope against the overwhelming bleakness of the girmitiyas' lot. In a history which is highly masculine in both its scope and performance, the women girmitiyas present a world view which is bred on familiarity, a shared sense of domestic history (the different ways of making mango pickle becomes the adhesive for their mutual affection) and a hope for resurrecting their lost worlds within the landscapes of an unknowable future that they are moving towards, thus undercutting the male-centric tropes of commercial, utilitarian and specifically structured history-making enterprise based on the misguided and overvaulting concepts of honour, success and immortality.

On the other end of the spectrum of labour stands the figure of the lascar. The lascar in his absolute abandon for the set rules of the ocean as conceived by the Empire creates a space for himself that lies beyond the usual markers of identity like place, space, language and attire. Hailing from the different places that speckle the Indian Ocean, the lascar, in the annals of nineteenth century nautical writing is almost always a figure unnamed. Ghosh, in his decisive essay 'Of Fanas and Forecastles: The Indian Ocean and Some Lost Languages of the Age of Sail' delves into the history of the lascars often to find that the lascars were masters of making themselves conspicuous and the only times they are mentioned in the recorded history of those times are when they are embroiled in legal or disciplinary actions. The lascars were however, the pioneers in facilitating the first feats of multicultural cosmopolitanism:

Like many paperless migrants in the west today, lascars were probably suspicious of public scrutiny, so it behoves us to note that there is not the least of the many curtains of silence which we seek to pierce when we inquire into their lives. But the truth is that their lives are of more interest today than ever before—for the very good reason that they were possibly the first Asians and Africans to participate freely, and in substantial numbers, in a globalised workspace. They were among the first to travel extensively; the first to participate in industrial processes of work; the first to create settlements in Europe; the first to adapt to clock-bound rhythms of work-time (the shipboard regime of four-hour work-shifts, or watches, was one of the most exacting disciplinary regimes ever invented); and they were the first to be familiar with emergent new technologies (nautical

engineering being itself one of the pioneering technologies of the industrial age). Not least, the lascars were among the first Asians to acquire a familiarity with colloquial (as opposed to book-learned) European languages. They were thus in every sense the forerunners of today's migratory computer technicians, nurses, high-tech workers, and so on. Indeed they faced many of the same problems that contemporary Asian and African workers face, with their western counterparts doing everything possible to limit their access to the most profitable labour market.¹⁶⁵

The lascars and their miscellaneous backgrounds form the 'other' to the uniformity of the British characters seen both in this novel, more so in *Flood of Fire*. They represent a new form of community that converge the antithetical concepts of sameness of community with the differences of individual choices of religion, language and regional identities. The lascars also reaffirm the other side of the historical tale that remains undocumented and lost in time. Taking history beyond the written word and the edifications that speak of victories and fallen martyrs, stories like Adam Danby (who remains an enigma as a pirate and Ghosh feeds on this mystery by presenting ample hints that Serang Ali might be Danby himself) endure as the whirlwind of the history of the other that lay in stark defiance of the datability of historical narrative. What becomes more symbolic is within the scope of the novel, these stories remain ingrained in baubles like the pocket watch which is gifted to Zachary, hinting towards a chasm which leads to a historical universe beyond measured time.

Carrying this disparate motley of people over the Black Waters, the Ibis becomes the point of convergence for all their stories, the vessel of the multiple histories that challenge the official narrative of this colonial enterprise. The community of *jahaj-bhais* and *jahaj-behens* even though built on an urgency of forming a spatial identity within the holds of the ship, contain within itself the remnants of the same religious, regional, racial and caste-related identity crises and politics. The Ibis acting as the beginning of a new journey, the proverbial God figure that determines the fates of its inmates according to rules that are no longer the same as those of the land, interestingly reaffirm those very land rules that its inmates as well as its own story of being a black-birder had tried to outrun. For the Ibis, the most potent reminder of her history of abuse is its ironic fate of having Zachary, the son of a slave, as her second in command. Even though her present inmates are no longer slaves, but they all carry the spectres of their own abusive pasts and the nail marks on the bulwark or the rancid smell of

¹⁶⁵ Amitav Ghosh. 'Of Fanas and Forecastles: The Indian Ocean and Some Lost Languages of the Age of Sail'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43 No. 25 (June 2008), p 58. PDF

human waste in the holding become chilling premonitions of the final destinies that await these individuals.

While migration and trade remain the major foci for the Trilogy, it is also a repository of knowledge about the various systems of governing that remain an intricate and often the deciding part for the sustainability of trade relations as well as the continuance of domination. This is brought out minutely through the elaborate space that is allotted to the narrating of Neel's trial and his subsequent incarceration. Extending from Michel Foucault's concept of punishment as a 'complex social function'¹⁶⁶ and a 'political tactic'¹⁶⁷, for Ghosh's narrative punishment also becomes the catalyst for the explosive changes that mark the turning of the novel from the static land to the flux of the ocean. Neel's arrest becomes one of the first movements towards the final journey in the *Ibis*. Wrongly accused for forgery so that Mr Burnham can take over his estate, Neel's arrest is performed as a spectacle that reiterates the position of the native within the scope of the colonial rule:

For a wild instant, the idea of escape lodged in Neel's mind—but only to vanish, as he recalled the map that hung in his daftar, and the red stain of Empire that had spread so quickly across it. Where would I hide? He said. The piyadas of Raskhali can't fight the battalions of the East India Company. No, there's nothing to be done. ... Ringed by a half-dozen uniformed constables, Neel made his way down the stairs. When he stepped into the courtyard the voices of the white-clad women rose once again to a shriek and they threw themselves at the constables, trying to reach across their batons, to the prisoner. Neel held his head high, but he could not bring himself to meet their gaze; it was only when he was at the gates that he allowed himself to glance back.

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The performance of the arrest brings into discussion the role of the prison and punishment in creating a consensus for rule. The parading body becomes an instrument or intermediary that etches upon itself the rules of governance and law through curbing or depriving of the individual's liberty that is regarded both as right as well as property. This is further enacted through the trial wherein through the garb of the garbled ideas of equality and right, the body is forced into acceptance of its will as a deviation and therefore in urgent need for correction.

¹⁶⁶ Michel Foucault. 'The Body of the Condemned'. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin, 1991 p 23. Print.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. p23. Print.

¹⁶⁸ Amitav Ghosh. *Sea of Poppies*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2008 p 173. Print.

Neel's trial also remains symptomatic of the seizing of estates, often illegally by the Company. Ghosh, in the trial scene provides two narratives that reflect off each other, opening themselves to their own hypocritical shrouds. While the pompousness of the judge and his reiteration of the tenets of equality and discipline painfully point out the irony of the scene within which it is unfolding (that of a wrongful trial and conviction), Neel's internal monologue that brought together the continuing sounds and sights of Calcutta with the absurd and non-normative proceedings of the court shows his own distancing from his own fate. This is a Neel who is completely different from the figure that we are introduced in the later instalments of the Trilogy, who is actively participant in channelling his own course. These two narratives also underline the inherent dualism that lies in the position of the elite native within the system of the colonial governance: one that gives an illusion of power and yet it is a power that can be obtained through absolute subservience.

Neel's incarceration in the Alipore Jail before his final deportation to Mauritius stands as a stark testimony to the position of punishment as an exercise of body politic that invests power knowledge relations into human bodies and in turn subjugates them by turning into objects of knowledge. Foucault, speaking about the changing traditions of punishment and through it the change in the power-knowledge nexus, states:

From being an art of unbearable sensations punishment has become an economy of suspended rights. If it is still necessary for the law to reach and manipulate the body of the convict, it will be at a distance, in the proper way, according to strict rules, and *with a much 'higher' aim*. As a result of this new restraint, a whole army of technicians took over from the executioner, the immediate anatomist of pain: warders, doctors, chaplains, psychiatrists, psychologists, educationalists; by their very presence near the prisoner, they sing the praises that the law needs: they reassure it that the body and pain are not the ultimate objects of its punitive action.¹⁶⁹ (Italics own)

Neel's incarceration becomes an exercise into this 'higher aim' of constituting the place of the other within the system of punitive action aimed at constitutive reformation. The jailors become proponents of the concept of punishment that strikes at the 'soul' rather than the body, however, through the agency of the body. The violation of Neel's body for the official 'check' is not as much an act of power over his body but rather an assertion over the political

¹⁶⁹ Michel Foucault. 'The Body of the Condemned'. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London :Penguin, 1991 p 11. Print.

technology of the body in which might be read a history of power relations. This is further proved through the small but significant act ‘Neel felt the touch of a hand, grazing against his toes, and he looked down to see the orderly brushing his feet with his fingertips, as if to ask forgiveness for what he was about to do’¹⁷⁰. Neel’s reiterative questions ‘Why is this necessary, sir?’¹⁷¹ and ‘what is the purpose?’¹⁷² are met with further brutalizing, a reminder of the fact that the prisoner and his voice or even any voice of dissent in this system fall into the abyss of incomprehensibility, one that falls through the cracks of a system completely vested in rooting itself in the tradition of the absolute. This discourse of the systematic punitive action works rarely in formulated, continuous avenues rather it implements itself in disparate tools and methods, indelibly constituting itself into pieces and morsels that often eludes surrender or complete comprehension.

Ghosh however, through Neel, explores an avenue of subversion that functions through the very prism that this discourse of punishment is viewed through. In one of the most poignant and powerful scenes in the novel, as Neel stands naked as his body is searched for traces of diseases, but more for a complete humiliation of his self, he continues a dialogue with the sergeant in the most polite usage of the same language whose law has deemed him a criminal:

Neel was now standing with his legs apart and his arms extended over his head while the orderly searched his flanks for birthmarks and other ineradicable signs of identification. But he did not miss the mockery in his jailer’s glance, and was quick to respond. ‘Sir,’ he said, ‘can you not afford me the dignity of a reply? Or is it that you do not trust yourself to speak English?’¹⁷³

It is this one act of defiance, addressing the jailer in his own tongue, ‘a thing that was evidently counted as an act of intolerable insolence in an Indian convict, a defilement of the language’¹⁷⁴ that transforms the humiliating position of the convict into one of transgression. The power of the language to affront the man, whose authority over Neel’s predicament was absolute, opens up a new avenue of power, a power that exists beyond the narrow scope of coercion. Language becomes the vehicle that allows for a paradigmatic shift in power discourse wherein the language of the oppressor serves as a weapon in the hands of the oppressed to validate their existence. As Neel’s bodily violation continues, his garbled

¹⁷⁰ Amitav Ghosh. *Sea of Poppies*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, (2008) p 288-9. Print.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p288. Print.

¹⁷² Ibid. p288. Print.

¹⁷³ Ibid. p289. Print.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. p289. Print.

English which he shouts out with every new abuse, ringing off from the walls of the prison presents a cacophony of dissent that even the jailer, in all his authoritarian position, cannot ignore. The jailer's loss of temper and use of violence to which Neel answers with 'A very good day to you, sir'¹⁷⁵ bears the final tilting of power equations and the breakdown of the discourse of punishment. This incident becomes one of the first instances of transgression through language and setting up of an alternate narrative, using the same lingual excesses but subverting them to accommodate these new actors of history—a thread that continues to be the dominant motif of the trilogy and opens it up to novel forms of dissent formation and creating alternate structures of national, social and individual narratives.

Sea of Poppies sets the stage for the multiple narratives that the Trilogy concerns itself with, but its most important role remains as the point of germination of ideological questions that plagues the new order whose governing tropes are based on set ideas of cultivation of both nature and the colonized mind. Straddling the narrative within the three distinctive worlds of the land, the river and the sea, Ghosh moves away from the discrete space of the nation marked in terms of borders; instead he concentrates on the boundaries that form the pre-national space which are porous, shifting and forever marked by a sense of indeterminism.

River of Smoke

Unlike most successive parts in a series wherein the second installation becomes a further study into the nuances of the characters already introduced in the first part, *River of Smoke* takes up the story of the Ibis from a completely different point of time and space and creates a second world wherein the old and familiar characters take a backseat as new places and people become the point of intrigue. While *The Sea of Poppies* closes with the Ibis in the grasps of a storm and the escape of the convicts, Jodu, Serang Ali and Madhoo into the whirls of the tumultuous ocean, *River of Smoke* opens with a sense of calm and finality that comes with the ending of a story. As we meet Deeti and her La Fami Colver on the serene and secluded Colver Farm hidden in the mountains, it is a world whose story has already been inscribed, be it in the form of Deeti's shrine or Neel's stories. However, unlike history which inscribes in order to mould itself into permanence, these stories are forever in flux and therefore the need to visit them repetitively in the form of additions to Deeti's shrine or the retelling of the same story to the family multiple times in order to attune oneself to the perennial nature of the change.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p290. Print.

There are three major strands that the novel explores in its course: the movement of the characters across and on the Indian Ocean, the opium trade that connects the three countries China, India, and England and finally other forms of globalized exchanges through the form of language, cultural motifs, flora and fauna. Ghosh intertwines these overarching trends in his narration and through such intermingling brings in multidimensional hues to each of them. Even though on a superficial level, *River of Smoke* seems to be a novel which is wholly invested in exploring and commenting about trade and globalisation pre the neo-global aspects of modern transnational commerce, it complicates such a reading through an investment into the other aspects of trading that focuses largely on the individual rather than a nameless and faceless commerce industry. I will soon come to the questions about globalisation that the novel both raises as well as answers, but prior to that it is imperative to look into the use of language that Ghosh utilises to bring alive the thronging life and culture of this globalised trade and how such a language also becomes a marker of subversion.

Deeti alone was less enchanted by this spectacular vista. Within a few minutes she'd be snapping at everyone: Levé té! We're not here ti goggle at the zoli-vi and spend the day doing patati-patata. Paditu! Chal!

To complain that your legs were fatigé or your head was gidigidi was no use; all you'd get in return was a ferocious: Bus to fana! Get on your feet.¹⁷⁶

This quote comes in in the first few pages of the text and it is interesting for two purposes. On one hand it shows Deeti's impatience towards the younger members of the Colver family who tend to stop on the way to the Chowkey to admire the view. But on a secondary level it can also be seen as the author's own impatience towards the readers who might be trying to figure out the nuances of this Kreol pidgin language and therefore might find themselves stuck both in terms of the pace of the story as well as in understanding it. The language that Ghosh applies to represent the Colver family is a curious mixture of English, French and Bhojpuri. It is a bastardization that not only intrigues the readers but also becomes a code, a code to be cracked in order for the alternate historiography or in this case the story of the inmates of Ibis and the other characters to be revealed to them. Language hence becomes the first point of subversive activity as language has always been the marker of isolation and legitimization. To explain it further, language, in its structured and syntactical form becomes the gatekeeper of expressions which in turn becomes the permitting agent for the transcribing

¹⁷⁶ Amitav Ghosh. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012 p5. Print.

of stories into accepted reveries of the past, that is, normative history. Thus, it is only with an overhauling of language itself that other forms of knowledge systems can be allowed to ride up from the depths of oblivion and be finally articulated. This idea of alternate historiography becomes further enunciated through the trope of the cave that Deeti finds during her initial days. Hidden from the direct sight of civilization, the cave interestingly contained human faeces, the remains of a body that refuses to answer back in the usual codes of structured and saturated language:

As soon as her eyes grew accustomed to the light she knew she had entered a space that had once been inhabited...In one corner there was even a scattering of ossified human dung, rendered odourless by age: it was strange that something that would have excited disgust elsewhere, was here a token of reassurance, proof that this cavern had once sheltered real human beings, not ghosts or pishaches or demons...[Later] she discovered that some parts of the chalky walls have been drawn upon with bits of charcoal; some of the marks looked like stick figures¹⁷⁷

While the spectral presence of the stick figures and the excreta provide a sense of safety for Deeti against the unwelcome fauna of Mauritius as well as inspire her to start drawing on the walls and make it a sanctuary of her stories, they called it '*Deetiji ka smriti mandir*', it also becomes the trace of the unspoken and unknown *other* who have now moulded into these unfathomable inanimate codes of excreta and childish paintings. It is interesting that Ghosh introduces the readers to Deeti's shrine just after recounting a small story about escaped slaves in Mauritius and their terrible fate:

This community of fugitives—or marrons as they were known in Kreol—had lasted until shortly after 1834, when slavery was outlawed in Mauritius. Unaware of the change, the marrons had continued to live their accustomed lives on the Morne—until the day when a column of troops appeared on the horizon and was seen to be marching towards them. That the soldiers might be messengers of freedom was beyond imagining—mistaking them for a raiding party, the marrons had flung themselves off the cliffs, plunging to their deaths on the rocks below.¹⁷⁸

While this anecdotal reverie of Deeti seem to be on a superficial level a recounting of a past that she needs to narrate in order for the present to have perspective, it also serves two

¹⁷⁷ Amitav Ghosh. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012 p12. Print.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p10-11

important purposes. Firstly, the anecdote, seemingly nostalgic and tragic, carries within itself the macrocosm of the slave trade that was the mainstay of European-owned plantation countries like Mauritius. The employment of African slaves and their exploitation was the foundation of these plantations as well as most of the European economy. However, post the abolishment of slavery, these slaves were replaced by *girimityas* like Deeti, indentured labour, wherein most of them would have sold themselves off for either money for families or to pay older debts, making them quite similar to their predecessors. The story of the marrons therefore becomes a premonition to the ill-fate of the indentured labour as well as a decisive indictment and condemnation of the abusive nature of the globalised Europe-dominated exchange of labour capital along with laying bare the garb of civilizing/freedom mission that hides the imperialist endeavours. This further can be read as a portent to the position of the Chinese in the Opium trade as well as the two wars that lead to the destruction of the country. Secondly, the story also reveals the ethnographic silence that surrounds the narratives of those who do not belong to the acceptable nodes of history writing. The suicidal pact of the marrons who would rather embrace death than be part of the mainstream labour force is articulated only in anecdotal reveries, bound to be lost in meaning just like the childlike stick figures in the cave. It is interestingly also the lapse of language and its availability to these disenfranchised figures that does not even allow the marrons to know that slavery has been abolished and those men were coming in to save them rather than take them prisoners. ‘That the soldiers might be messengers of freedom *was beyond imagining*¹⁷⁹(own emphasis) carries within itself the years of distrust, the silencing as well as the violence that went into the creation of the mutual non-permeability of the languages of the European masters and the marrons. This anecdote bears testimony to the years of exploitative relationship and yet the impenetrability of the two races that leads to the obliteration of the exploited one that is sanctioned in the name of the undecipherable character of the ‘native in the bush’. Therefore, it is fitting that Deeti in the bastardized form of a language which has no written legitimacy or structure, which is an amalgamation of different languages in the most arbitrary form, can give a voice to the story of the marrons and immortalise it through her retelling, passing them on from one generation to the other, such that their *antistory* stands as a disintegrating agent against the moulded forms of validated history, the ever changing cave as an antidote to the museumizing culture of mainstream history.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. p10

Language becomes an equal force in not only the commercial aspects of the opium trade, but also in the act of re-orienting history through the process of retelling of stories. At the beginning of the novel, the readers find Neel as an extension of the Colver family, a paternal figure who carries within himself the different threads of the stories of the family's past. Neel's stories hinge on being repeated innumerable times such that they become part of the lived experience of both the younger members of Deeti's clan as well as the readers. 'Repetition is the method through which the miraculous becomes a part of everyday life'¹⁸⁰ and it is this repetition privileging the oral over a static written history that makes their *antistory* a dynamic act of rebellion. What makes this rebellion even more captivating is its final etching into memory not through the act of words but through painting, let it be the stick figures in Deeti's shrine or Robin Chinnery's scroll paintings, pointing towards other forms of archiving. Neel's relationship with letters, language as well as journals continues onto the next novel *Flood of Fire* where it reaches its climax, but we will delve into that discussion a little later.

Language also acts as an equalizer between the trading Chinese community and the foreigners in Canton. The pidgin language that is specially developed for trade, a mixture of different phrases and words taken from the different languages that have been brought together by its speakers becomes an example of a cultural exchange that lay beyond the scope of mere economics. Describing the details of the language, Ghosh writes,

...the common language of trade in southern China was a kind of patois—or, as some called it, “pidgin”...even though many Chinese spoke English with ease and fluency, they would not negotiate in it, believing that it put them at a disadvantage in relation to Europeans. In pidgin they reposed far greater trust, for the grammar was the same as that of Cantonese, while the words were mainly English, Portuguese and Hindusthani—and such being the case, everyone who spoke the jargon was at an equal disadvantage, which was considered a great benefit to all.¹⁸¹

The pidgin was not simply a middle path taken up due to the inherent suspicion of the other that remains latent in all the characters, it became a currency of expression of ideas and emotions which had no place within the structured and class-conscious pure languages of the characters. Therefore, a Bahram can only be comfortable in his relationship with Chi Mei and

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p14

¹⁸¹ Ibid. p171

give in to its excesses as long as he converses with her in this bastardized language. It is also the language that allows Neel to forge a friendship with Compton or for Robin Chinnery to find a companion and partner in Jacqua. The Chinese-Indian pidgin therefore transcends its role of just being a language of commerce; it becomes a platform on which the various interpersonal relationships of love, friendship and sexual unions are acted on. Through the course of the novel, Ghosh weaves in a deep sense of vernacular nostalgia that create a web connecting the migrants, travellers and businessman with the idea of the homeland. ‘In the distant shores of Canton, vernacular Indian languages like Bengali and Gujrati emerge as the only mode of reactivating memories of their homeland for people like Neel, Paulette and Bahram. It is a necessary reminder of their “identity”, of the place to which they really belong in spite of the multiple roles they are fated to bear’¹⁸². It is this sense of nostalgia that takes Neel time and again into Ashadi’s kitchen boat or for that matter Paulette’s amazement and joy at hearing Baburao speak Bengali. Language also contains within itself the geographical and spatial memories and nuances which many a times in the novel becomes a better expression of identity than the mother tongue. So, for a character like Paulette, Bengali becomes a language that carries with it the secret codes and notions of familiarity which English or French cannot provide her. She makes a complete fool of herself by trying to speak in English with the crew of Redruth, her language becoming a bearer of unintended sexual innuendos. Similarly when she meets Robin, the half-English, half-Bengali illegitimate son of George Chinnery, they choose to converse in Bengali, a language that takes them back to the helter-skelter of Calcutta, all their memories of each other, from Robin’s colourful clothing, his painting, the friendship between Paulette, Jodu and him, all preserved in the familiar comfort of the Bengali words; as Neel would put it ‘it was wonderfully comforting to speak Bengali’¹⁸³. Language also stands as a different side of the globalised trade, where linguistic exchanges mark the intermingling of as well as blurring of nationalistic lines of separation. In contrast to the colonialist rhetoric of civilization and freedom as well as maintenance of cultural purity, linguistic intermingling, where words easily penetrated structured languages and changed its contours seamlessly, shed light on the fluid nature of human expressions, ones which cannot be contained through boundaries. Thus, it is symbolic that as the battle line of right and wrong were being drawn by the Chamber in terms of the Chinese government’s ban on opium, Neel and Compton begin to

¹⁸² Samrat Laskar. ‘Vernacular Nostalgia to Hybrid Pidgins: A Study of Linguistic Bridges in *River of Smoke*’, in *In Pursuit of Amitav Ghosh: Some Recent Readings*. Eds. Tapan Kumar Ghosh & Prasanta Bhattacharya. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2013 p186.

¹⁸³ Amitav Ghosh. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012 p356. Print.

work together on the blending in of words and cultures in a book whimsically titled ‘Celestial Chrestomathy’.

The languages used in Canton were also symptomatic of the place that houses them and provide them a platform for exchange. Fanqui-town which worked as both the entrance to the world of the Celestials as well as an outcast space, separated from the Forbidden City and eyed with suspicion, remains constantly in a state of flux, like the endless permutations and combinations of the glass pieces in a kaleidoscope.

‘Fanqui-town’, as old hands called it, was a place at once strangely straitened yet wildly luxurious; a place where you were always watched and yet were free from the frowning scrutiny of your family; a place where the female presence was strictly forbidden, but where women would enter your life in ways that were utterly unexpected¹⁸⁴

In appearance Fanqui-town is not at all as you might expect: indeed it is so different from what I had envisioned that it fair took my breath away! I had imagined the factories would be prettily primed with a few Celestial touches—perhaps a few curling eaves or pagoda-like spires like those that so beguile the eye in Chinese paintings. But if you could see the factories for yourself, Puggly dear, I warrant they would remind you rather of pictures of places that are very far away—Vermeer’s Amsterdam or even...Chinnery’s Calcutta. You would see a row of buildings with columns, capitals, pilasters, tall windows and tiled roofs. Some have colonnaded verandas, with the same khus-khus screens you see in India: if you half close your eyes you could think yourself to be on the Strand, in Calcutta, looking at the bankshalls and daftars of the big English trading houses. The colours are quite different though, brighter and more varied: from a distance the factories look like strips of paint against the grey walls of the citadel.¹⁸⁵

The two accounts of Fanqui-town phrased by Bahram and Robin Chinnery respectively become testimony to the multitudinous hues of the space that changed its contours according to the needs of the person who inhabited it. For Bahram Modi, the self-made businessman,

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. p52

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. p182

Fanqui-town represents freedom wherein he can be the two different versions of himself, the businessman who is shrewd in his ideas and well loved by his employees, and the hopeless lover who finally finds solace in the figure of Chi Mei, a washer-girl who bears him a son. On the other hand, for Robin, the bastard son of the famed painter George Chinnery, Fanqui-town represents both individuality and community as it is here that he can finally emerge out of his father's shadow both as a painter as well as a person (there being ample hints in the text stating his father's displeasure at his cross-dressing) as well as create for himself a community of friends based on their mutual feeling of being outsider to the mainstream, ranging from Charles King to Jacqua. Fanqui-town in both the portrayals can be seen as both the periphery and the centre; while it is always under scrutiny for being the foreign enclave, it is also a space of endless possibilities being on the fringe. The fringe here however, does not get defined by the centre which in this case is the Celestials. What is interesting about the sociological structure of the place is while it remains grounded within the contours of the trade relations with the Chinese, it also creates a microcosm of the global trade transactions, fusing them all together in a moment of cosmopolitan multiculturalism through the Thirteen Hongs. In this regard, it is interesting to explore the historical accounts of Fanqui-town, which was all but destroyed in 1856. MIT's Visualizing Cultures project, which was started in 2002, gives us a fair representation of what Fanqui-town would have seemed like during its times:

During the passage from Macau up the Pearl River foreigners passed through densely populated agricultural lands and market towns, but they never saw a major city until they reached Guangzhou. We call the trading system that lasted from 1700 to 1842 on China's south coast the "Canton system" because of this city's dominance. Guangzhou (which Europeans called Canton), an ancient city and one of the largest in South China, had flourished as an administrative and trading center for over 1000 years before the Westerners arrived. Arab and Persian traders had lived in its foreign quarters under the Tang dynasty since the 8th century. Like most traditional Chinese cities, Canton had a large wall surrounding the central districts, major avenues within the wall, extensive market districts outside the wall, and constant contact by riverboats with the surrounding countryside and distant ports.¹⁸⁶

As the sketch represents, Canton was not only the entry point for the foreigners for their trading work, it also symbolizes a settlement of the racial Other, in this case an Other which

¹⁸⁶ 'Canton Trade', MIT Visualizing Cultures.
http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/rise_fall_canton_03/cw_essay01.html. Web. 25. 08.2015.

is not ghettoized through the racial marker of merely skin or language, but one which is dichotomous—singular in its outsider status and simultaneously multiple in the way they worked towards maintaining their own racial, national differences. The Thirteen Factories, each represented with their respective national flag is not only an expression of nationalistic ardour, but also the clear indication of the belief of both brotherhood and segregation that these Hong represent. Even though at a macrocosmic level, Fanqui-town seems to be the consummate whole of the presentation of the Other, on delving a little into the multitudinous mini-structures that make the town, one realises that the racial lines are very clearly drawn in terms of the Isays (British), Acchas (Hindustanis) and Merdes (French). The clever punning on the word ‘Achha’ and the Hindustani ‘Accha’ (which denotes good or all right) brings to focus the moral connotations of good and bad that the traders as well as the Chinese grappled with about the foreigners’ stay within the Chinese territories.

Ghosh extensively details the layout of the Hong through which he tries to understand the sensibilities of the inmates of the respective Hong. The picture of the Hong that one gets from the historical accounts veers starkly away from that of Ghosh:

The foreigners lived in buildings called “factories,” which included living quarters, warehouses, and offices for trade. (These factories did not manufacture anything; the name comes from “factor,” an older English word for “commercial agent.”) The Chinese called them “hongs,” or merchant shops. The factory buildings lined up along the waterfront, each with its distinctive national flag. The British were the first to arrive, but soon after the Austrians, Danish, Dutch, French, Spanish, Swedish, and Americans followed them. The entire quarter acquired the name “Thirteen Factories.”... Although their impressive facades copied Western classical designs, behind the facades the factories looked very much like typical Cantonese merchant buildings. They had a long, narrow hallway down the middle, with rooms off to the sides. Chinese contractors provided nearly all of the construction materials, including low-fired brick, tile roofs, paving stones, lime, iron, marble, and bamboo. The British supplied teakwood windows and stairs, iron door locks and stoves, and glass window panes. Small courtyards were scattered through the building complex. The bedrooms upstairs, and the clerks’ rooms, were simple and spare.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ ‘Canton Trade’, MIT Visualizing Cultures.
http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/rise_fall_canton_03/cw_essay01.html. Web. 25. 08.2015.

While the historical accounts represent the Hongks as simply the working fronts for the various foreign businesses, for Ghosh each of these became the metonymic representations of a much larger national fervour that brought into sharp contrast the divisive politics of the subcontinent. At various junctures in his sketch of the Hongks, Ghosh comments on the hyperbolic notions of nationhood as articulated through giant flags outside each of the factories which look like ‘gigantic lances, plunged into the soil of China, and they rise high above the factory roofs, as if to make sure that they are visible to the mandarins within the city walls’¹⁸⁸, he is also quick to provide the contrast in the Achha Hong which ‘of course has no flag of its own’¹⁸⁹. The Achha Hong housing inmates from various parts of the subcontinent becomes an imagined community that lies beyond the delineations of the nationalistic zeal. While the arbitrary characteristics of nationhood determine the behavioural patterns of the other Hongks, the Achha Hong becomes a differently imagined conglomeration wherein the ties of familiarity which were knotted were not defined by an ‘excess of self-regard, but rather a sense of shared shame’¹⁹⁰. In the midst of the structured identities of the other Hongks, the Achhas become the radical other who in their very difference form a sense of commonality, one that is ruled by a shared consciousness of moral duty towards a future on whose claim they had ventured into their respective actions. Ghosh presents this poignantly through the perspective of Neel, one who himself has till then hinged his identity on the modality of difference (let it be class, language or caste), pointing towards a community that can be assumed and worked on, one that does not aim towards a project of homogeneity in the garb of being ‘one nation state’:

...all its residents, from the lowliest broom-wielding kussabs to the most fastidious of coin-sifting shroffs, took a certain pride in their house, not unlike that of a family. This surprised Neel at first, for on the face of it, the idea that the Achhas might form a family of some kind was not just improbable but absurd...Had they not left the subcontinent their paths would never have crossed and few of them would ever have met or spoken with each other—far less thought of eating a meal together...Whatever it was, after a point you came to accept that there was something that tied you to the other Achhas: it was just a fact, inescapable, and you could not leave it behind any more than you could slough off your own skin and put on another¹⁹¹.

¹⁸⁸ Amitav Ghosh. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012 p184. Print.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p185

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p193

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p192-3

Fanqui-town also becomes an interesting subversion along with being an undermining of the Western bias towards rigidly compartmentalised political spaces. The political space as envisioned by European political thought has been a representation of clearly demarcated areas of conquest as well as ownership, where the map and its contours become the indicators of the cultural and social differences. This extreme segregation is easily reflected in the English characters of the novel, Mr Lancelot Dent, Mr. Jardine, Mr. Whetmore or Mr. Slade. Each of these characters based on real life players in the Opium trade, in spite of years of inhabiting the space within Fanqui-town and by extension in China, refuses to surrender their personal understanding of space dynamics to immerse themselves in the new political milieu where the Co-Hong members and they become part of a new community rather than holding on to their fixed identities based on territorial characteristics. Their refusal to have Chinese food, their larger disdain for what they believe as the effeminate nature of the Chinese, specially their business partners the Co-Hongs all point towards an aggressive obsession towards maintaining the status quo as well as an inherent fear of being contaminated by the Other; an Other who is both an excess and a lack. This is further accentuated in the form of the Canton Chamber of Commerce which supersedes its nominal role of being a forum for foreign trade, instead becoming a platform where the racial differences are further delineated. Zadig Karabedian's remark to Bahram on the event of Bahram's invitation to join the Committee 'But you will have to do it Bahram-bhai...And not just for Hindusthan—you will have to speak for all of us who are neither British nor American nor Chinese'¹⁹² becomes a testimony to the Chamber's act of 'othering' the racial and the spatial inferior within the realm of the supposed free realm of Fanqui-town. This is evinced through the fact that even though Bahram Modi is made a member of the Committee and his Parsee community does provide the most expensive farewell gift to Jardine, they still becomes victims of racial abuse where they are explicitly told, '...this was no place for monkeys and we should leave'¹⁹³. The Chamber therefore becomes the micro-platform for the larger segregatory politics of ownership that the Empire goes on to represent and uphold. In this regard we can look into anthropologist Paul Bohannan's perceptive and decisive work on differences of political organisation of space between Western and non-Western societies as we go on to inspect the forming of the multifarious Other within the boundaries of Fanqui-town. In his phenomenal work, *Africa and Africans*, Bohannan makes an insightful observation where he compares Western conceptualization of space and territory with those found in Africa:

¹⁹² Ibid. p202

¹⁹³ Ibid. p407

The African view of terrestrial space tends...to be one based on the regulation of social relationships. The Western view of the same space is irrevocably based on exploitation...Land (terrestrial space) is a “thing” which modern Westerners cut into pieces...Such was never the case in Africa. There a community was and is built fundamentally on relationships within social groups based on some principle other than “economics”; that community is set into space, by other than associations of “ownership” as we recognize it, and exploits the space around it...The Western map is, as a matter of fact, a strange kind of map...None save modern technical civilizations have maps in which precision is so essential.¹⁹⁴

The growth of mapping territorial conquests have led to the formation of the modern notion of the primacy of the nation state as the only legitimate form of political organisation. Nation-state as well as nationalism becomes the offshoots of the Industrial Revolution, particularly the need for clearly defined property relationships which permitted the principle of contract to operate more easily. With the disappearance of local self-sufficiency and the emergence of new institutions that propagate a higher sense of interdependence, it became necessary for the masses to identify with emerging industrial societies. Nationalism was a response to this need and the nation-state arose as the most potent organisational form for the initiation, dissemination and perpetuation of modern industrial life. This growth of nations also perpetuated a redefining of kinship values, where the nation becomes a super-family headed by a father figure and where kinship is now defined through filial relation of brothers and sons. Following this, ‘exclusiveness’ became the primary determinant to international relations leading to conflict-ridden situations where expansion of one state is always at the cost of another. States became defined by the contours of their boundaries and every irregularity was seen as a potential threat to the homogenizing mission of being one happy family.¹⁹⁵ This idea of exclusivity runs deep within the Chamber’s Committee which becomes a microcosmic representation of the nationalizing project of the Empire. With trade as its foundational currency, the Committee plays a dichotomous role wherein its centre of power forever remains absent from its immediate surrounding while all the time influencing its decisions. The inclusiveness of the Canton Committee moreover is more of a formal requirement than an actual step to integrate the various races as ‘This policy was necessitated by the peculiar circumstances of the Canton trade, in which a very large proportion of the

¹⁹⁴ Paul Bohannan. ‘Space and Territoriality’, *Africa and Africans*. Garden City: The Natural History Press 1964, p-174-6. Web. 03.09.2015.

¹⁹⁵ Edward W Soja. *The Political Organization of Space*. Washington: Association of American Geographers 1971, p10. Web. 03.09.2015.

incoming goods were shipped from Bombay and Calcutta. Since many of the supply chains, especially of Malwa opium, were controlled by Indian businessmen, it was acknowledged to be impolitic to enforce too rigidly the racial norms that were followed by the clubs of the Indian subcontinent¹⁹⁶. The hypocritical all-inclusiveness of the Chamber gets further exposed in its dualistic stance wherein it on one hand surmises its importance in deciding the trade relations between China and the foreigners, while on the other hand, it refuses any sort of responsibility for the individual criminal actions of its British and American members like Mr. Innes or Mr. Dent and instead taking a decision to offer Bahram as a sacrificial lamb to the Chinese. Therefore, the inclusion of someone like Bahram Modi does not merely become a tokenistic addition but one which becomes replete with multiple meanings specially in terms of representing the other.

Before one invests into an acute reading of Bahram's Modi's character within the scope of the Opium trade, it is imperative to look into the subversive space of the community of the 'Other' that cohabits within the same boundaries of Fanqui-town as the Chamber and its members, one that deliberately transgresses the liminal political definitions of caste, colour, nation and language. Contrasted to the rigid and codified structure of the Chinese Celestials or the British and the Americans, the others in Fanqui-town are in a constant state of flux where the different walks of people come together in a process of constant convergence of ideas and selves. This is explored through the different friendships and acquaintances that form the space of the other. Zadig Karebedian's (fondly known as Zadig Bey in the novel) serves not only as Bahram's friend and a foil to his character but also embody the other extreme of trade relations in which trade separates itself from its exploitative utilitarian nature and becomes one which thrives on the idea of the 'useless' artefacts like clocks. Unlike opium whose lack of utility also makes it an object of obsession and addiction, bringing in greater and acute moral debates of good and evil in its wake, Zadig as well as Charles King along with the botanist Penrose, Paulette and finally Robin Chinnery, and the group of Canton artists bring forth a new form of trade which lies beyond economics and rationality, one that captures the essence of human relations, exchange of cultures and ideas not formed through globalised capital. Zadig also represents the fringe communities of the Armenians who are the first true global citizens as they no longer have a notional 'home' to return to. This homelessness expresses itself in the easy accommodating characteristic which is accentuated by a sense of a 'positive lack'—a lack symbolised through an absence of

¹⁹⁶ Amitav Ghosh. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012 p197. Print.

ritualistic adherence to traditional bonds that hinders a character like Bahram. This positive lack allows Zadig to be at ease with his dual lives as well as gives him the courage to follow what he believes as listening to the desire of his heart and choosing the life that makes him happy. Moreover, it is this sense of rootlessness that often places Zadig in the capacity of being the moral compass as well as the chorus for both Bahram and the readers, turning them from the immediate action of the present into the vast avenues of accountability to both a past and a future towards which both the reader and the character bear a responsibility towards—a responsibility to remember, a responsibility to be remembered. Zadig's role of being the chorus is presented through his part as a translator for Bahram when they are invited to meet Napoleon Bonaparte, the exiled conqueror. The meeting with Bonaparte serves two distinct purposes in the text. On one hand, this historio-fictional account of meeting Napoleon provides a new angle to the imperialistic mission, where Napoleon stands for the failure of an earlier form of such an operation. Secondly, Napoleon's interest in Bahram as well as his trade shows the rising interest of the West in the newly participating native classes in the colonial process through the act of trade. Presenting Napoleon as both the figure of the unflinching beast who killed thousands to acquire power and conquer new territories while also the caged royalty who is tragically pathetic in his desperate attempts to hold on to his lost grandeur, Ghosh through the mouthpiece of Zadig, who translates the whole conversation for both Bahram as well as the readers, presents the other side of the power dynamics of global conquests where the imperialistic fervour of the Empire which looks at a figure like Napoleon as an antiquated barbarian is ironically on the same path of destruction, refusing to learn from history's failures. This interaction also for the first time spells out the ethical dilemma of the opium trade for Bahram and remains a premonition to the final destruction of both Bahram and China, as Napoleon succinctly phrases it, 'What an irony it would be if it were opium that stirred China from her sleep'¹⁹⁷.

In contrast to Zadig, Bahram Modi stands as a personification of the moral dilemma of the very subcontinent that he represents in the Chamber, one trying to synthesize the disparate points of moral, ethical and rational ideas within the singular state of personal opinion that becomes the mouthpiece of the Other. While Zadig Bey juggles the multiple roles of being the businessman, friend, lover, family-man with ease as he compartmentalises them under the overarching idea of his personal belief in good and evil, for Bahram it is a much more difficult as each of his roles invariable becomes intertwined with his positions in other

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. p174

aspects of his life. Ghosh even though claims that Bahram's character is based on the forefather of his own Parsi teacher, one cannot but help to note that the character seems to have drawn heavily from the historical figure of Jamshedji Jijibhai who has been one of the most prominent figures in the history of Bombay Parsees. As one goes into the details of Jijibhai's life, certain similarities with Bahram's character are overtly noticeable:

[Jamshedji] was born of poor but respectable parents on the 15th of July 1783 at Navsari, in the territory of Gaikwar of Baroda. He came to Bombay at an early age and lived with his father-in-law, whom he joined in business after he served his apprenticeship to him. Of a restless and adventurous disposition, he found his energies fettered in Bombay. He therefore sought other fields for the exercise of his commercial spirit, and in 1799, when he had scarcely completed his sixteenth year, he made his first voyage to China in the service of a Parsi merchant...After a short stay there he returned to India, but he had seen too much of the vast field open to commerce in that country to remain long in Bombay. He left the service of his father-in-law, and for the second time started for China to trade on his own account. Returning thence with a sufficient competency, if not with wealth, he made three other voyages to the country of the Celestials.¹⁹⁸

Ghosh takes in the basic tenets from Jijibhai's biography into creating Bahram's character, let it be his gregarious nature or even his need to divorce himself from his father-in-law's shadow and build an empire unto himself, but he also infuses these with an inherent moral battle of personal and business ideals that becomes both the success and the cause for tragedy for Bahram. It is interesting to note that Ghosh brings in the historical figure of Jijibhai in the final instalment of the Ibis Trilogy, presenting him as one of the major players within the China trade.

Bahram's desire for China becomes the inaugural point of his search for individuality which Canton's dichotomous position of being both known and unknown provides and promises, unlike the structured spaces of Bombay where he is but a pawn within the greater machinery of the trade community. His relationship with Chi Mei is an extension of this grappling for an individual space where he becomes the decisive agent of change, let it be in articulating his desire for her or deciding on how to provide money for Ah Fatt, the son born out of this illegitimate relationship, or even his relationship with Allow who he gives opium as a token

¹⁹⁸ Dosabhai Framji Karaka. *History of the Parsis: Their Manners, Customs, Religion and Present Position*. London: Macmillan 1884, p78-9. Print.

of gratitude for being the messenger boy between him and Chi Mei. Bahram is the only character who joins in the plotline in the second book and yet becomes the driving force of both the second and third instalments of the trilogy, both as a character influencing the course of the novel as well as a case study for devastating nature of the globalised trade of the Empire on the other. Bahram becomes an amalgamation of multifarious points of view, a schizoid personality who in his endeavour to choose the right path of action actually ends up in a self-destructive pact that ultimately ends in his suicide in an opium-induced haze, driven to insanity by the calls of his multiple selves. Bahram's inclusion into the Chamber becomes the trigger that brings into question the moral and ethical dilemma of trading in opium. With the Emperor's edicts repeatedly asking for a ban on trading in opium and such narcotics, Bahram has to finally come to terms with the ethical connotations of his trade, one that he had allowed for this long to be relegated to the deep trenches of obviated memory. His first evening at the Chamber dinner where he is taken up by Dent to discuss the future of opium trade marks his inner conflict about the future of the business as well as his own trade as for Bahram his business is an extension of his independent free self, one that is not fettered by caste, class and family rules of conduct, one in which he becomes the master of his own destiny. Opium also ironically becomes the source of maintaining his second life with Chi Mei. On one hand, it is the opium trade that allowed him to make multiple trips to China, providing him with the necessary time frame to invest himself in being Seth Bahram Modee who is revered by all and who maintains the secret life with his mistress and his son, on the other hand, it is opium, rather the smoking of it, which can create a synthesis for his multiple selves to be at peace with one another. Opium becomes the singular point of both creation and destruction of his self, he sees the drug as an ally, an extension of his own self :

Whether by design or not, it happened that the chop-boats that carried the last foreigners to the Bogue followed a route that took them past the field where the surrendered opium was being destroyed...He [Bahram] did not need to be told what they were doing: he had spent half a lifetime ferrying those familiar mango-wood crates across the seas; even at that distance they were easy to recognize...even though he would have liked to be spared the sight of their destruction he could not tear his eyes away from the men who were standing waist-deep in the tank, stamping upon the

opium: it was as if his own body were being trod upon until it melted into the water and flowed into the river—like the dark sludge that was spilling from the sluices.¹⁹⁹

It is significant that Bahram embraces death by drowning himself in the same river waters surrounded by the haze of the familiar smoke of opium, putting the warring fragments of his self to their final rest.

Ghosh explores the sociological and cultural history of the Parsees, through which he tries to locate it within the larger history of colonial rule in western India. In the trading world of seventeenth century Surat a few Parsees could be found among the important guarantee brokers and ship-owning traders. However, Surat declined in its growth potential due to the simultaneous decline of three empires—the Safavids of Iran, Turkey’s Ottoman Empire and the Mughals in India. Further attacks by Marathas in the early eighteenth century weakened the position of the Parsees in the area. During this time, the security offered by the East India Company and the promotion of a commercial ethos by it in Bombay caused Parsee merchants to shift to the city. Even though they mostly started off with ship building endeavours, soon with the promoting of trading with the Far East by the English Company caught their interest and in as early as 1756, two Parsee merchants, Hirji Jivanji Readymoney and his brother left for China and set up the first Parsee firm in Canton. By the end of the eighteenth century, Bombay was thriving in its scope of being the premier commercial center of western India. Every year a large number of ships from Bombay carried raw cotton to China and returned with tea, sugar, porcelain, silk and other such items. It was easy for the Parsee merchants to be the significant players in the China trade as they were one of the pioneer shipbuilders in the subcontinent. This background in shipbuilding became one of the major sources of the Parsee fortune, as evidenced even in Ghosh’s work where Bahram’s father-in-law Seth Rustamjee ‘had made it his mission to prove that Indian-made vessels—which Europeans commonly spoke of as “country-boats” or “black-ships”—could perform as well as, if not better than, any in the world’²⁰⁰. It was in the early nineteenth century that opium emerged as one of the more important item of export to China. The Parsee businessmen venturing into China also entered into partnerships for long distance trade. The most significant of these partnerships was one where Jamshedji Jijibhoy joined hands with Motichand Amichand to

¹⁹⁹ Amitav Ghosh. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012 p544. Print.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. p49.

export raw cotton and collaborate with Jardine Matheson and Company for the trade in opium²⁰¹.

One of the questions that Bahram is accosted with throughout the scope of the novel is the place of morality and ethical responsibility in globalised trade which ironically hinges on the ideas of exploitation, destruction of the host country and an evasion of accountability by espousing the logic of Free Trade as the governing principle of all such activities. The tenets of Free Trade, wherein trade is seen as the natural right of the individual, one which lies beyond ideas of humane sense of liability, one where the diktats of supply and demand become the central determinants rather than the laws of conscience, act as the garb that camouflages the ever widening greed of the foreigners. Ghosh takes this idea one step further and shows how the modern clambering for the concept of the democratic nation as the only true and acceptable form of political organisation is an extension of those same principles of Free Trade, wreaking havoc in societies whose organizing principles were weary and therefore suspicious of such mercantile foundation for the community. Ghosh postulates on the problems with the concepts of Free Trade in a much larger canvas in the final part of the Trilogy where the approaching doom of the Opium war and the subsequent destruction of China becomes a chilling premonition to the present day political crisis arising out of a similar dependence on the doctrine of demand and supply devoid of ethical connotations. Ghosh himself draws a parallel to this as he remarks,

And today when people talk about the doctrine of free trade, they do it as though it were this thing without any history, as though it had nothing preceding it. And yet, this doctrine comes to us soaked in blood and soaked in criminality.²⁰²

What further complicates this is the converging of the ideas of masculinity and manhood with the concepts of exploitative trade couched in the valiant ideologies of freedom and right. Burnham's caustic reply to Charles King's impassioned support of Howqua and the other Co-Hong members, stating that Free Trade is an extension of the masculine self where 'Masculinity has everything to do with it'²⁰³ and that China and all Asiatic countries suffer from the 'curse' of effeminacy, one which has led to China's piteous condition and 'Until the masculine energies of this country are replenished and renewed, its people will never understand the value of freedom; nor will they appreciate the cardinal importance of Free

²⁰¹ Rusheed R. Wadia. 'Bombay Parsi Merchants in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Parsis in India and the Diaspora*. Eds. John R. Hinnels & Alan Williams. London: Routledge 2007. Print.

²⁰² Robert Alford. "Interview with Amitav Ghosh, 'A Seafaring Tale of Globalisation Anchored in the 19th Century.'" Real Change News, 26 Oct. 2011. Web. 10.09.2015.

²⁰³ Amitav Ghosh. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012 p468. Print.

Trade²⁰⁴ becomes a testimony to the eminence of a certain kind of masculinity, one which is defined by ruthlessness and lack of emotive capability. As John Tosh puts it, '[e]mpire was a man's business in two senses: its acquisition and control depended disproportionately on the energy and ruthlessness of men; and its place in the popular imagination was mediated through literary and visual images which consistently emphasised positive male attributes'²⁰⁵. Similarly, Joanna de Groot contends that, 'manliness and empire confirmed one another, guaranteed one another, enhanced one another, whether in the practical disciplines of commerce and government or in the escape zones of writing, travel, and art'²⁰⁶. This idea of the masculine space gets carved out into the sociological pattern of Canton.

Canton is envisaged in the novel as a purely masculine space where the notions of brotherhood and family gains a fresh perspective. Canton and its Fanqui-town creates within itself a space which remains unanswerable to the Victorian notions of family structure, where its residents are expected to form alternate notions of filial ties. It is interesting to note that while the alien man is allowed to become a part of and prosper within the native place of Canton, the alien woman is kept away. Penrose's remark to Paulette when she expressed her interest to go to Canton, 'European women aren't allowed to set foot in Canton. That's the law...Foreign women can go no further than Macau—that is where they must remain'²⁰⁷ testifies to the idea that the foreign woman is kept as an outsider both as a precaution, the contamination of the 'pure' white woman by the native is the cultural violence from which the white community needs to be protected, as well as interestingly and ironically as an idea of a threat, the threat of the contamination of the free space with familial structures and modes of moral conduct. This notion of masculinity becomes a reiterative rhetoric that goes on to define the working principles of Canton. Let it be the bonhomie between Neel and the rest of the household in the Achha Hong, or the elaborate dinners and dances of the chamber or the refusal of the Chamber to agree to the Celestials diktats of surrendering the opium, all the major threads of action within the contours of Canton become representative of the masculinity debate. However, this masculine project is not a simplistic one-dimensional performance of gender roles. It flourishes into multiple renditions each of which subvert and challenge the heteronormative primacy of subjectivity. Beginning with Bahram's affectionate

²⁰⁴ Ibid. p469

²⁰⁵ John Tosh. *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Harlow: Pearson, 2005 p193. Web. 10.09.2015.

²⁰⁶ Joanna De Groot. "'Sex' and 'Race': The Construction of Language and Image in the Nineteenth Century." *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century*. Ed. Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall. New York: Routledge, 1989 p122. Web. 10.9.2015

²⁰⁷ Amitav Ghosh. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012 p103. Print.

hugs and kisses which are seen not as effeminate but rather gestures of power ('He knew there was no danger of being rebuffed: such exuberance might be looked upon askance in a European but in an Oriental of sufficient rank it was likely to be seen rather as a sign of self-assurance'²⁰⁸), the various balls and dances as well as the openness with which the idea of the 'Friend' is explored, all point towards the colonized space as a moment of surplus, a hedonistic immersion into excess and desire. This is further chronicled through Robin Chinnery's obsessive need to go to Canton, a place which is painted with an almost Edenic simplicity and innocence, one where he might find a 'Friend' to be his companion away from the demands of the world that he inhabits. Jardine's relationship with Whetmore, Charles King's tragic love story that keeps him bound to the shores of China, as well as the newly blossoming love affair of Robin and Jacqua all represent a moment of absolute giving into the realms of desire wherein the bondages of social sanction, scrutiny and societal norms no longer persist. This sense of abandon is also evinced through Chinnery's comment on sartorial choices where from wearing the 'dullest kinds of costumes' while appearing in public, in Fanqui-town every one wore the most intricate of clothes hued in multiple colours, with the most precise detailing, wearing the 'most *breathtaking* clothes: silken gowns with magnificent embroidered panels'²⁰⁹.

By mid-nineteenth century, self-control, restraint and distance had become the hallmark of masculine behaviour, a restraint which was not only to be exercised in emotional acts but even in the sartorial choices and in every mode of life. As Graham Dawson has suggested, the relationship between heroism, nationalism, and the 'preferred forms of masculinity' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced, and fulfilled through representation, the need for a 'dominant conception of masculine identity' that is, the 'true Englishman'²¹⁰. In spite of the rigidity in performing the masculine order, all-male spaces often blurred the distinctions between private and public modes of behaviour, where the very participation in homosocial acts was seen as a reaffirming of masculine behaviour. It is in this performance of the homosocial bond such as the dances and the close friendships innocuously terming each other as 'Friend' enacted within the space of Fanqui-town that the homoerotic couched itself in. John Potvin delves into this idea of the intermingling of the homoerotic in the homosocial in his essay on the eroticised space of the Victorian Turkish Baths, where he examines this further stating,

²⁰⁸ Ibid. p232.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. p215

²¹⁰ Graham Dawson. *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities*. London: Routledge, 1994, pp. 1-2. Web. 10.09.2015.

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defines male homosocial bonding and power along a continuum mitigated by 'the gender system as a whole', which she designates as 'male homosocial desire'. Distinct from the homosexual, the homosocial institutionally reinforces the 'social bonds between persons of the same sex' and can be 'applied to such activities as "male bonding"'. The shifting and ever contingent boundary between the homosexual and heterosexual placed along the homosocial continuum is problematized by the potential of same-sex eroticism, a desire which must remain inarticulate, closeted. Michael Hatt contends that the homoerotic has little if anything to do with 'homosexual desire but about the articulation of a desire that cannot be validated'. The resulting effect is that men's bodies are left vulnerable to a penetrating desiring gaze, a reversal in the subject/object equation in which male hegemonic privilege is maintained through sexual difference. Male intimacy and its codes of enactment occasion a tension at the level of reading its signs, for a slip in the reliability of the image or sign has the potential to displace aesthetic disinterest into the erotic, allowing desire or better yet the homoerotic to pass unnoticed.²¹¹

While Fanqui-town becomes a larger landscape of a similar sexual politics as evinced in Potvin's analysis of the Turkish Baths, just like the Baths it is also a temporary carnivalesque space whose temporality makes it all the more urgent. Similar to Jardine's departure from Canton to go back to England to get married and settle into his life of restrained gentleman leading lives of quiet desperation marks the end of the relationship with Whetmore, the homosocial world of Fanqui-town becomes the arena of playing out the homoerotic and tabooed relationships before one has to go back to the curtailed and structured spaces of marriage, family and Victorian civilizational ideals. The mid-nineteenth century concept of the brute masculine inserts itself within the alternate world of Fanqui-town through the official figure of Captain Elliot.

Captain Elliot is so Pucka, so much the soldierly Sahib, that his visage has become a part of his uniform—it seems to belong not to one man alone but to an entire platoon of men, all clad in blue, with close-cropped hair and trimmed moustaches. When he spoke, his voice too seemed to issue from the weather end of a naval quarter-deck: it

²¹¹ John Potvin. 'Vapour and Steam: The Victorian Turkish Bath, Homosocial Health, and Male Bodies on Display'. *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Winter, 2005), p 327. Web. 10.09.2015

was unemphatic and authoritative, the kind of voice that might be expected to exhort reason on everyone.²¹²

Captain Elliot becomes a smaller prototype of the larger scope of the Empire and its inherent double standard. His military dress and demeanour works as an extension of the same concept of mannered, unflinching and emotion-less masculinity that lay at the heart of the colonial civilizing mission. He is the quintessential British Sahib who stands as a shining example of what the civilized Sahib should present himself as. Ghosh brings in a similar character in the next part of the trilogy wherein Captain Mee becomes the unravelling of the Sahib figure within the torrential terrain of the changing politics of the subcontinent. It is interesting that Ghosh presents Elliot in the novel through the eyes of Robin Chinnery, a character who stands not only at the opposite extreme of the Victorian moral scale due to his bastardized background, but also one whose performance of his gender identity stands as a defiance to this masculinity project.

Fanqui-town does not only serve as the platform for these alternate notions of sexuality to act out in defining relationships beyond the socially sanctioned institutions of marriage and family, it also becomes an avenue to examine other forms of exchanges that stand as alternatives to the exploitative trade principles of the Company. Penrose and Paulette's horticultural endeavours, Robin Chinnery and the Canton artists' painting of Fanqui-town as well as the mysterious picture of the golden camellia that brings these two storylines together present a different view of the global exchange. In one of the many exchanges, Chinnery writes to Paulette about his discussion with Zadig looking at the long history of contact between China and the foreigners in trade and other such exchanges. Robin notes his surprise in learning that,

But how is it possible, I said, that people from Hindustan and Arabia and Persia were able to build monasteries and mosques in a city that is forbidden to foreigners? It was then that I learnt it has not always been thus: there was a time, said Zadig Bey, when hundreds of thousands of Achhas, Arabs, Persians and Africans had lived in Canton. Back in the time of the Tang dynasty (they of the marvellous horses and paintings!): the emperors had invited foreigners to settle in Canton, along with their wives and children and servants.²¹³

²¹² Amitav Ghosh. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012 p372. Print.

²¹³ *Ibid.* 131

However, Robin writes that in the eighteenth century, the Dutch, under the guise of constructing a hospital, had built fortifications, drastically changing the dynamics of this interaction.

From then on the Chinese knew the Europeans would stop at nothing to seize their land—and one thing you have to say about the Chinese is that unlike others in the East they are a practical people. When faced with a problem they try to find a solution. And that over there was their answer: Fanqui-town. It was built not because the Chinese wished to keep all aliens at bay, but because the Europeans gave them every reason for suspicion.²¹⁴

This exchange reassesses the truth that determines China's hostility towards foreigners providing a context to what till now has been represented as merely prejudice and insularity. As Sanjukta Poddar remarks concisely, 'Through the mode of detailed discussions and conversations among the characters, Ghosh indicates his belief that these acts were not the norm but cautious, deliberate and gradual measures taken by the Chinese from the late eighteenth century onwards to control the belligerent and acquisitive attitude of the Europeans'²¹⁵. This also provides a window into the other ways of exchange and trade that lie beyond the aggressive trade and military nexus. Through the polyphonic voices of the myriad characters in the novel who stand as sharp contrast to the hegemonic forces of global trade, Ghosh provides alternate visions of cultural, social as well as environmental exchanges that lead to a revising of anthropological and historical concepts of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. By delinking the idea of cosmopolitanism from its present association with the concept of the nation and nationalist policies, Ghosh redefines cosmopolitanism through an intricate network of movement of people and ideas through the porous borders of nations, deconstructing the macro-concepts of globalisation and multiculturalism into micro-concepts of individual reactions and participation in the global exchange. Akhil Gupta discussing the Indian Ocean trade network between the seventh and fifteenth centuries (before the disruptive arrival of the Portuguese), comments,

Not only did these networks lead to an incredible exchange of ideas, technologies and goods, they also brought people from different lands into contact with each other, often for extended periods of time. This created centers of cosmopolitanism that, in their extensiveness and reach, were comparable, and perhaps even more intensive,

²¹⁴ Ibid. 132

²¹⁵ Sanjukta Poddar. 'Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke*: Globalisation, Alternative Historiography, and Fictive Possibilities', *Postcolonial Text*, 10.1 (2015), p 10. Web. 10.09.2015

than anything we can observe in the world today—at a very different moment of globalisation.²¹⁶

Ghosh highlights three modes of cross-cultural existence that display a degree of critical self-reflexivity and distance from exploitative trade networks; but these represent a miniscule section within the wide maritime world. These are: nature, specifically plants of medicinal and aesthetic value; art and creativity; and the hybridity of lineages and lives. The key character in the exchange of flora and fauna is Paulette Lambert. Daughter of a French botanist, she grows up in Calcutta, completely naturalised as a Bengali Memsahib. The death of her father and the problematic living conditions in the Burnham household forces her to become an inmate in the Ibis in the first novel sailing off to Mauritius. In *River of Smoke*, on a chance encounter with Mr. Penrose (also referred to as Fitcher), a famed plant collector, who works in exchange of plants between Europe and the Far East, Paulette joins him as both his helper as well as one who carries forward his task of this flora and fauna exchange. Ghosh is quick to point out on the onset of this alternate exchange that even though the horticultural transaction lay beyond the imperialistic mission, ironically it was still the East India Company and its hold over Canton that allows Fitcher to continue as well as successfully complete his journeys on the Redruth. This indebtedness to the Company is expressed in the Chinese reluctance in allowing any such horticultural enthusiast to proliferate within the Celestial Kingdom being particularly aware of their exploitative potential and thus, Fitcher as well as other plant collectors are only allowed to obtain Chinese plants from the different nurseries in Canton and Macau. However, in spite of such constricted allowance within the Celestial Kingdom, what still remains intriguing about the Redruth and its journey into Macau is the new form of consensual exchange that it facilitates. The barter of plants from South America, Europe and China, opens the three continents to influences of each other to an extent where Robin Chinnery muses,

It is odd to think that this city, which has absorbed so much of the world's evil, has given, in return, so much beauty. Reading your letters, I am amazed to think of all the flowers it has sent out into the world: chrysanthemums, peonies, tiger lilies, wisteria...One day all the rest will be forgotten—Fanqui-town and its Friendships, the opium and the flower-boats...But when all the rest is forgotten the flowers will remain, will they not, Puggly dear?

The flowers of Canton are immortal and will bloom for ever.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Akhil Gupta. "Globalisation and Difference: Cosmopolitanism before the Nation State." *Transforming Cultures* ejournal 3.2 (2008) p12. Web. 10.09.2015

The flowers will be the passage that will pass Canton and its idiosyncrasies from communicative memory of oral stories that Neel keeps repeating into the vast realms of the immemorial; it is the flowers that will mark the intermingling of generations of differences into a kaleidoscopic performance of a new composite identity.

Another avenue of exchange that Ghosh examines through the novel, one which contains the potential for mutual enrichment, is the arena of painting and art styles. Ghosh, through the character of Robin Chinnery, explores the various forms of art making and also comments on the hierarchy that lies inherent within such a world. The Cantonese school of miniature painting is seen as inferior to European school of realist painting or for that matter even Chinese high art. However, as Robin visits one of the prominent studios in Canton and sees the factory line technique of painting, where different individuals work on different aspects of the painting and the finished version is a conglomerate effort of all rather than one specific artist, he is both surprised at the intricate detailing as well as amazed at the level of finesse these supposed inferior artists possess. This ‘bastard art’ as Robin refers to it however fuses together European techniques with Chinese ones, in the process creating art that is imbued with multiple layers of meaning. Robin reflects that while European art deems itself superior in its confidence of more realistic depictions through the deployment of perspective, European artists ignore the potential of miniature painting with its ability to simultaneously depict multi-layered complexity in great detail. Similarly, the Chinese style of scroll painting has a dynamic narrative potential which is lacking in its European counterpart. Robin with the help of Jacqua invests himself in mastering this bastard art which often becomes an embodiment of his own sense of unbelonging, straddling between two cultures that refuse to accept him as its own. For Robin, painting is often as potent as a moment of love-making, one where every brush stroke is a new awakening of desire, one that lies beyond the material world of bargain and commercial bondages. It is significant that it is Robin’s scroll painting of Fanqui-town, with all its quirks and blemishes as well as its chaos that remain as the last testimony to the existence of that world. Beyond the imperialistic mission, the greed and the exploitation, the thronging life of Canton’s rainbow-hued inhabitants, what remained was not the profit and the loss, but the memory of a place that once was, frozen in a moment of clarity. Just like Neel’s Chrestomathy, Robin’s painting becomes the token of the past invested in the future, for the future to remember that such a time existed. As Ghosh, through the words of Neel, closes his novel,

²¹⁷ Amitav Ghosh. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012 p536-7. Print.

The picture cost more than I could afford, he [Neel] said, but I bought it anyway. I realized that if it were not for those paintings no one would believe that such a place had ever existed.²¹⁸

The third and the final alternate form of cross-cultural assimilation that Ghosh explores through his novel is that of interpersonal relationships. While the first two form of exchanges are optimistically seen as a mutually enriching counter to the exploitative nature of the opium trade, the avenue of interpersonal relationships is one that Ghosh as a commentator is ambiguous about its overall effect. While relationships like Paulette's friendship with her ayah's son Jodu, or Neel's affectionate relationship with Compton, which do not carry within them the threat of a sexual assimilation are seen as abounding and growing, the ones which lay beyond such asexual unions are fraught with problems. The relationships of Bahram and Chi Mei, Zadig and his Ceylonese mistress as well as George Chinnery and his Bengali mistress, all hinge on a similar platform of the upper class and mobile male and the disenfranchised lower class female who tend to belong to the colonized space. Set in a time when the colonies are not yet beset with the extreme constricted Victorian morality, each of these relationships become explorations into the social sanctions that both goad the participants into these illicit affairs as well as restrict them from giving into these relationships fully. Except for Zadig, who makes the difficult decision of choosing his Ceylonese wife and in turn become a pariah figure in his own community, both Bahram and Chinnery are unable to take such a stand. While for Bahram, Chi Mei is that desiring self that can only be accepted in either darkness or in the opium filled day reveries, George Chinnery portrays the other side of the colonial enterprise. The historic-fictional character of George Chinnery does not limit itself into being an example of one of the many mythicizations that Ghosh carries out throughout the novel. His art stands as an instance of British high-handedness which refuses to see any other form of Oriental work as worthy of critical praise. His affair with his housemaid that bears him a family which he takes care of till his whims continue and then abandon them to begin a new life for himself, reads as one of the manifold examples of the dual lives led by people within the Empire and the proliferation of a new generation of men and women who were the collateral of such lives. Both the illicit sons in the novel, Robin who is introduced to all as Chinnery's nephew and Ah Fatt who is denied both the legitimacy of his father's name as well as being called his family, present a new face of the disenfranchised who are un-accommodated and remain marginalised within the

²¹⁸ Ibid. p553.

structures of both the paternal and the maternal societies. Carrying the ‘bastard’ name similar to Hector Prynne’s locket as the looming presence in their lives, both these characters show the flip side of the entrenched social prejudices and the national-cultural barriers that would make such assimilations impossible to be actualized. Ghosh does provide respite through the characters of Ashadi and Baburao, who have seamlessly conjoined their Chinese lineage with their Bengali homeland, or Neel who makes the transition from the egotistical Raja to being the humble Munshi open to different forms of knowledge and quick in his loyalty but theirs are but the few examples of such integrations. While Ghosh optimistically provides his authorial sympathies with these integrated characters, he also is acutely aware of the fact that it is the Robins and the Ah Fatts who are the rule rather than the exceptions.

The triumph of *River of Smoke* as an enquiry into the older forms of globalization lies not in its listing of the global trade networks or by creating a comparison with modern trade relations; rather Ghosh harshly criticizes the various aspects of the Opium trade and sees the Opium wars much like the disturbances and political upheavals in Middle East in contemporary times: uselessly violent and exploitative to assuage the ego of one nation and its people’s concept of freedom. *River of Smoke*’s feat lies in its optimistic engagement with other forms of transactions which may allow a dissolution of the harsh and opaque national borders as well as bypass the exploitative transnational financial networks. It hints towards a reading of history that has to free itself from the shackles of factual and causal relationships and instead open itself to other forms of retelling, ones which have been misconstrued as unreliable—family stories, myths, and gossips. Ghosh often utilises the supernatural (Chi Mei and Allow’s ghosts) as well as legends and myths like the story of Adelle to counter the rationalistic and jargon-driven rhetoric of the foreigners and the Committee trying to rationalise Opium trade. Moreover, such stories also create a human account of the opium problem which both challenges as well as unravels the idealistic ivory-towered discourse of the Committee members like Slade, Dent and Burnham. It also engages the reader to read into the multitudinous faces of colonialism, let it be the Wordy Market that presents the most honest face of the colonial enterprise in its unadorned bargaining nature or the various edicts and letters curated from volumes of historical documents that undo the smooth rhetoric of both capitalism as well as imperialism but lay buried in oblivion due to manipulation of story-telling. Ghosh’s narrative celebrates cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism but it is not an utopic and idealistic celebration. Gupta on speaking of the problems of cosmopolitanism states,

If by cosmopolitanism one means the seamless negotiation of difference, and the ability to operate in different cultural and social contexts without any difficulty whatsoever, then it could be argued that this is an utopian ideal which even the high modernist versions of that term could only gesture toward, but not ever possibly fulfill.²¹⁹

Ghosh is aware of the pitfalls of such utopian understanding of cosmopolitanism and his characters like Bahram stand as practical examples of such beliefs. However, Neel, Paulette, Ashadi, Zadig, Robin all represent the flawed cosmopolitanism that can stand as an answer to the fixed yet chaotic notions of nationhood, historiography and story-telling expressing hopes for mutuality and equality.

Flood of Fire

The last instalment of the *Ibis* Trilogy, *Flood of Fire* takes the narratives of both its predecessors and fuses them into a saga where the past, present and future come together in a moment of unity. *Flood of Fire* tunes itself to be both a prequel as well as a sequel as it constantly shuffles between time graphs which lie distant to each other but ones which are all intrinsically tied up into the final narrative of the inmates of Ibis and their fortunes. The narrative shifts its timeline from the distant past of Kesri Singh's life before being part of the army which links it to the *Sea of Poppies*, into the intermediate past that presents the love affair of Zachary and Mrs. Burnham connecting it to the timespace of *River of Smoke* and finally the immediate present of the narrative through Neel's journals and Shireen's trajectory, both of which are poised towards an unknown looming threat of a future that promises to drastically shift subject positions.

While the chronicle takes off from the concluding parts of its preceding *River of Smoke*, it turns its authorial telescope on characters who had till now resided only as footnotes in the other stories. Thus, one has Kesri Singh, Deeti's brother coming into the story from being one of the numerous paintings adorning Deeti's walls, Shireen Modee, the docile and unsuspecting wife of Bahram, Raj Rattan, Neel's son whom we had last met expectantly waiting (one which proves to be futile) for his father to come fly kites with him in *Sea of Poppies*, Mrs Burnham who had been seen as the conniving and the boisterous wife of the

²¹⁹ Akhil Gupta. "Globalisation and Difference: Cosmopolitanism before the Nation State." *Transforming Cultures* ejournal 3.2 (2008) p17. Web. 10.09.2015

sexually deviant Mr Burnham along with a host of other characters each of whose destinies tie them indelibly to the tapestry of the Ibis, even if they have never been one of its voyagers.

The storytelling process follows the same techniques as seen in *River of Smoke*, oscillating between the omniscient author and the personal narratives of the characters; the only change that one notices is the shift from the epistolary narration of Robin Chinnery to the more disciplined journal entries of Neel. This small change in narratorial technique serves two purposes. One, Neel's journals become a study in the movement of languages and their translation, one that reflects the greater cultural gap that haunts the action of the novel. The journals begin with Neel proclaiming ironically, 'I realised also that it would not be wise to write in English, as I had intended—better to do it in Bangla; it is less likely to be deciphered'²²⁰ while the journals are made available to the readers in English through the translator intervention of the novelist. This transformation or translation from Neel's original Bangla to English documents the progression from the exclusivity of the vernacular to the all-consuming nature of the English language, one that makes secrecy impossible. Neel's obsession with words is also a statement on the changing tapestry of cultural exchanges that is based on languages. The peppering of Chinese in his Bangla journal which is then read by the readers in English shows the constant fluidity of these languages that lie in sharp contrast to the boundary-bound physical spaces of Canton, Bombay, Calcutta and the other locales that the novel traverses through. Secondly, Neel's journals also provide a window into the world of the Chinese and their voice which is often lost or worse misinterpreted due to politics of language. Similar to Chinnery's letters which served as a portal to the multifarious world of Canton, Neel's journals become the mouthpiece for China which is caught up between the greed of the foreigners and the indifference of its rulers. In one of the entries, Neel presents the frustration of this 'Middle Kingdom' at being at the receiving end of the exploitative politics of translation studies that at once serve as a warfare tactic. Compton's anger at the mistranslation of the Chinese word 'yi' into English as 'barbarian' rather than 'foreigner' show the devious role that language itself plays in deciphering difference and making the 'other' available to the self. This manipulation becomes more intriguing when one realises that 'Some of these translators are notorious opium-smugglers; they are clearly twisting the Chinese language to make trouble...they want war, so they are looking for

²²⁰ Amitav Ghosh. *Flood of Fire*. India: Penguin Books Ltd., 2015, p18. Print.

excuses and even a word will do'²²¹. Neel's journals therefore function as the other end of the process of documentation which plays a central role in the act of archiving. In a clear and measured movement away from the impersonal narrative of war, his journals provide a humane account of the ones who have been lost in the haze of officialdom. It is pertinent to note that Neel's journal entries become sporadic from July 1840 onwards (the crucial time frame just before the first war) before stopping completely. This occurs simultaneously with the event of the attack on the Chinese fleet by the British and their eventual defeat. The lack of written documentation for the Chinese point of view available through Neel's journals once again augments the skewed balance of representability within History writing. What one is left with, after the disappearance of the journals, are the myriad eye-witness accounts of people desperate to hold on to the memories of events whose foot prints have been successfully erased from the bookshelves of the past—accounts which keep modulating with the dimming of memory, as forgetting sets in.

This novel explores the countless stories of the inmates of Ibis and their near ones and stacks them into four dominant narratives that often overlap into each other: Shireen and her journey to China to claim her husband's share in the opium war, Kesri Singh and the Indian army that fights on behalf of the British in the Chinese wars, Zachary and the Burnhams and their tryst with the Chinese opium trade which interestingly links itself to the chronicle of Raj Rattan who with the help of Baboo Nobo Kissan goes in search of his father, and finally Neel and Compton and their representation of the Chinese side in the war. Each of these strands present a gateway to new debates and discussions about the politics of trade and cultural exchange, as well as provide valuable insight into the role of nations in examining and exploiting such policies. Ghosh presents an informed picture of the formation as well as the role of the Indian army in overseas expeditions of the Company and in the process also illustrates the antecedents of nationalistic fervour that slowly begins to germinate within the consciousness of the Indian soldier, one that finds its final outburst during the Second World War and in the ensuing demand for independence.

Ghosh opens the novel with a description of the 'Rusud Guard' (foraging party), the chaotic extension to the structured world of the Indian army. Consisting of the camp followers whose numbers far exceeded the soldiers who they were supposed to serve, '(t)heir caravan was like a moving city, a long train of ox-drawn bylees carrying people of all sorts—pandits and milk-women, shopkeepers and banjara grain-sellers, even a troupe of bazar-girls. Animals too

²²¹ Ibid. 190-1

there were aplenty—noisy flocks of sheep, goats and bullocks, and a couple of elephants as well, carrying the officers’ baggage and furniture for their mess, the tables and chairs tied on with their legs in the air, wriggling and shaking like upended beetles. There was even a travelling temple, trundling along atop a cart²²². As Ghosh has pointed out in his interviews, there has been a conspicuous absence of discussion about the subaltern extensions that was an equally important side of the British Indian army, one which formed a link between the codified world of the army to the colonized and chaotic space of the Indian subcontinent. Standing as a contrast to the disciplined lines of the soldiers, the foraging party represented the meeting point between the lived reality of the colony and the idealised notion of the army: “behind the caricatures of ‘martial races’ were millions of people with miscellaneous backgrounds, ambitions, fears and needs”²²³. The bazaar with its religious teachers, pundits and other holy men also stood as antagonistic to the organized religion of the British officers. A figure like Paglababa who bases his teachings on the everyday lived reality of the soldiers, constantly challenges the moral, sexual and spiritual certitude of the British officers. Working against the methodical nature of religion, these fakirs represented the other side of religiosity, one which was based on an understanding of the living conditions as well as the psychological processes of the young soldiers. Therefore, it was no surprise that ‘in the battlefield, sepoys had much more faith in the protection of the amulets they received from fakirs and sadhus than in the blessings of pundits and imams’²²⁴.

Ghosh delves deep into the organizational pattern of the army, peppering the narrative with ample examples of the various practices both within and without the army lines that determine the fate of the soldiers, exposing the inherent exploitative nature of the colonial army.

As Ghosh trains his authorial lenses on Kesri Singh, brother of Deeti, the oft mentioned but fringe character in the earlier instalments of the trilogy, the readers are acquainted with the nuances that work into making a soldier figure within the Bengal Infantry. The recruitment process that the Company follows is shown as akin to the exploitative practice of buying animals for slaughter. Similar to checking on the breed and the build of the animal before the final bargain is made, the recruits remain voiceless in the process of their own fate in the registration. It is rather the other members of the family, the elders of the village as well as the landlords that decided on the various issues related to recruitment. Yasmin Khan talks

²²² Ibid. p1-2

²²³ Yasmin Khan. ‘Peasants into Soldiers’, *The Raj At War: A People’s History of India’s Second World War*. Gurgaon: Random House India 2015, p18. Print.

²²⁴ Amitav Ghosh. *Flood of Fire*. India: Penguin Books Ltd., 2015, p122. Print.

about the process of recruitment in her comprehensive study of the Indian army at the dawn of the Second World War, where she states,

Men, had for generations, not been assessed as individuals but as representatives of their race, a complex business in a land of such variation. They were first and foremost physical specimens, expected to match the ideal type of their caste or tribe. Breadth of chest, decent eyesight and the ability to follow basic orders were essential. If they had additional skills, or could read or write, they might have a chance of promotion. The physical inspection was rudimentary. Stripped down to their underwear, the men stood for measurement and medical inspection in a line before arriving in front of the Recruiting Officer. If he was pleased with what he saw he often inscribed their chests with a large chalk 'tick'.²²⁵

While the final selection was often done by the British officer, the preliminary choices were often controlled by the Lance naiks and the subedars who acted as the middle men in the process and often utilised their connections in the villages for the process. Maintenance of caste and family name was of paramount importance in the selection process. Therefore a figure like Kesri, who joins the army by running away from home, is always seen as suspect as he stands as antagonistic to the idea of the sepoy's loyalty that begins with his loyalty at home and to his caste. The army however, represents for the sepoys not an organisation to fulfil his desires of honour and bravery but rather as a form of a 'fixed deposit' that would be beneficial for his family as well as take care of his basic needs. 'A place in the Indian Army meant a job and a full belly...above all, the army promised a way to extend support to other family members; new recruits became not only bread winners for their immediate kin but sometimes for numerous dependents'²²⁶. This is further testified not only in the change of views of Kesri's family once he begins to send in money but also in the reaction of the soldiers when they are informed about their impending mission to China: 'The talk of history and glory made little impression on the sepoys. They listened impassively, their faces even stiffer than usual. Only when the captain announced that he had arranged for money to be distributed, as advances on salary payments, did the sepoys liven up...As always the sepoys sent most of their money home, keeping only a little for themselves. This, in the end, was

²²⁵ Yasmin Khan. 'Peasants into Soldiers', *The Raj At War: A People's History of India's Second World War*. Gurgaon: Random House India, 2015, p25-6. Print.

²²⁶ Ibid. p24.

what mattered to them most, neither history nor glory, but the sustenance of their families, back in their villages'²²⁷. The position of the sepoy, cut off from his family and yet continuing to make his decisions in their terms is poignantly captured by Ghosh in the miscellaneous letters that the sepoys wrote before their deployment where their only concern was who gets their land after their death or how through death they would have failed as bread winners of their families. The tragedy of the sepoy gets further nuanced as Ghosh makes the unlikely comparison of Kesri (as a prototype of the marginalized Indian sepoys) with that of the prostitute Gulabi, where they are both disenfranchised as well as the pariah figure, yet ones who are used mercenarily for the pleasures of the other. The colonial sepoy within the larger rhetoric of nation, history and nationalistic fervour end up becoming mere machines, means to achieve a goal which at its very onset is alien to them.

The Indian sepoys have been long used for a dual purpose: one, where they were sent overseas to fight for the Empire and defend it against other foreign forces and second, at home where they were used to conquer territory and secure the frontiers of the Raj by systematically taking over Indian ruled territories and expanding the contours of the Empire. They have been instrumental for the imperial defence since the nineteenth century in Java, Malacca, Penag, Singapore and China. However, their loyalty to the force still remained suspect, an interesting example of which is that they both triggered and helped suppress the Indian uprising of 1857. Therefore, at every point the Indian sepoy had to immaculately follow the rules and regulations of the army as he was under scrutiny, a figure who was always under watch for the smallest of slips which could be taken as proof of his rebellion against the Raj. This is expressed succinctly by Ghosh in his introduction to Vedika Kant's work, *'If I Die Here Who Will Remember Me?': India and the First World War*, where in response to a picture of a colonial sepoy in a prisoner of war camp watched over by the guards, he writes, 'Whether in captivity or not, the sepoy had always to contend with the gaze of those he served: on the other side of the battle-lines too he would have known himself to be under constant watch, hemmed in by fences that related not only to his physical being but most significantly to the question of his loyalty, this last being a matter of such profound uncertainty that no one perhaps was more unsure of it than he himself. It is this ambivalence above all, that defines the predicament of the sepoy, not just in the First World War, but in many other conflicts before and after.'²²⁸ One can perceive this ambivalence of behaviour in

²²⁷ Amitav Ghosh. *Flood of Fire*. India: Penguin Books Ltd., 2015, p305. Print.

²²⁸ Amitav Ghosh. 'My Foreword to "If I Die Here Who Will Remember Me?"'. www.amitavghosh.com/blogs. (September 2014). Web. 01.10 2015.

the way that Kesri as well as the other recruits were always asked to maintain their uniform, the most potent visual representation of their loyalty to the Raj. In the later part of the novel, Kesri considers it best to escape in the Ibis after the death of Captain Mee as he was assured that his word would never be believed now that his legitimizing partner, the white sahib is no longer present.

The Indian army, in spite of its claim of being fair and just remained largely biased against the Indian sepoy for the greater part of its being. As Khan points out, 'Differential treatments of Indians and Britons remained enshrined in the Indian Army's rules'²²⁹ with equality between Indian and British officers allowed only in 1943. Even though there was camaraderie among the soldiers, it was never a reflection of a complete dissolution of racial identities. Ranging from the provision of inferior guns given to the Indian sepoy to the decision of where should they set up tents, Ghosh examines multiple cases in which the Indian sepoy is treated similar to that of a prisoner of war and yet they form the first line of defence for the Empire. The difference in pays as well as the different *battas* which are granted to the Indian and British soldiers further problematized the rhetoric of oneness that was harped on by the colonisation process itself. The sepoy though does not have a choice in making a decision about quitting the army for such differential treatment as the punishment for desertion is death.

While the army rules perpetuated a disparity in the position of the soldiers, it was the maintenance of the caste rules within the barracks that further alienated the sepoy. In a bid to keep the subedars and the naiks within their control, the British officers allowed free reign over observance of caste laws and this resulted in an army, which even in its most disciplined phase was still broken down in terms of caste positions. As Kesri joins the Pacheesi, he is made acutely aware of his position within this framework, 'It didn't take long for Kesri to realise that the Pacheesi was a fiefdom for Bhyro Singh and his clan. Behind the battalion's external edifice of military rank there lay an unseen scaffolding of power, with its own hierarchy and loyalties'. It is this other domain of power that forces Kesri to barter Deeti for his own advancement within the ranks, while also making his decision to sign up as a *balamteer* (volunteer) for the China mission once Deeti's final fate was conveyed to him. The hypocritical mask of equality, which is paid lip-service within the army, slips even further as one observes that this surveillance of caste is transformed into a different kind of divisive practice of class within the ranks of the officers. Captain Mee's background as the son of a

²²⁹ Yasmin Khan. 'Peasants into Soldiers', *The Raj At War: A People's History of India's Second World War*. Gurgaon: Random House India 2015, p72. Print.

shopkeeper who rises in the army ranks, on a superficial level serve to continue the rhetoric of equal opportunity that is harped on by the Company. However, his thwarted love story with Mrs Burnham as well as his exceedingly familiar ways with Kesri brings out the other side of the narrative where he is no longer the modern hero figure who despite all odds has been able to break down class barriers, but rather a pathetic and pitiful tokenistic representation of equality, one who is alienated from both his peers due to the his class position and from his sepoys due to his skin colour. He is the disenfranchised sahib who is an outcast within the hierarchy of his peers while he ironically is seen as one of the vessels of colonial power by his Indian counterparts. It is paradoxical that while in the training one of the main criterion for creating the soldier figure is to isolate himself from the familiar, the recruiting process for both Indian as well as British soldiers is based on the questions of family, caste and class backgrounds, ones that go on to determine not only their entrance into the army ranks but also their positions for the rest of their stay within the army hierarchy.

Ghosh devotes a greater part of the canvas in the novel in establishing the bond between Kesri and Captain Mee, in an attempt to show the other side of the colonial relationship. Often reminiscent of the relationship between Arjun and his batman Kishan Singh in *The Glass Palace*, Kesri and Mee are the two extreme corners of the colonial process, both powered by it yet completely powerless in being masters of it. Kesri, the eldest son of his family is seen as an asset by them and therefore their reluctance to send him to join an army. However, as fate intervenes in the form of his sister Deeti, Kesri finds himself as one of the *balamteers* on the way to defend the Empire, let it be in Assam or in China. Kesri is assigned to the temperamental but good hearted Captain Mee, whom he guards as fiercely as he would his own kid. Kesri calls Mee his 'butcha' (kid) as he remains responsible for Mee's initiation into the world of not only the different rules of the army but also of its internal politics. Ghosh, however, unlike a Kishan Singh who remains voiceless for the most part of the narrative, acting the role of the amiable native who only follows orders and does not mull over their efficacies, invests in Kesri the important debates of accountability, position of the soldier within the colonial set up and finally the futility of the Indian sepoy in the power structure. In one of the many journal entries of his, Neel in a conversation with Zhong Lou-si, discusses the position of the Indian sepoy within the colonial army structure. While Neel agrees that the sepoys are merely mercenaries, fighting for an army not for some zealous pride but for the money that it pays, he also realises that the question of moral right to fight for a force that keeps you in chains is a debate that is slowly surfacing within the

consciousness of the sepoy. His argument is validated through Kesri, a character he would not meet in the scope of the trilogy, who is constantly within the throes of his conscience questioning the ethical position of a soldier like him. In one of the most poignant soliloquys within the novel, Kesri standing over the dead bodies of the Chinese soldiers questions his role as an agent of this history:

Looking down, Kesri saw that the rocks below were littered with corpses: evidently rather than surrender, dozens of Chinese soldiers had chosen to throw themselves down from the heights.

Once again Kesri was reminded of earlier campaigns, in the Arakan and against the tribes of the hills. There too the defenders had fought in this way, squandering their lives in desperation. For sepoys and other professional soldiers there was nothing more hateful than this—it seemed to imply that they were hired murderers... So much death; so much destruction—and that too visited upon a people who had neither attacked nor harmed the men who were so intent on engulfing them in this flood of fire. What was the meaning of it? What was it for?

A tremor went through Kesri as he thought of the part that he himself had played in what was unfolding around him now: deep within he knew that his actions would have to be answered for in many lives yet to come.²³⁰

Trying to understand the efficacy of fighting a battle whose ethical side is questionable, Kesri looks to the Mahabharata to answer his dilemma. While he quotes to himself the importance of duty and honour and therefore his need to be a part of this, one realises that what he truly struggles with is the ‘dharma’ of his actions. While to go back on his oath to the British would be dishonour (and death sentence), ‘he tried to find some comfort in these thoughts, but without success’²³¹. Kesri’s quandary which he unwittingly expresses when he is jarred into questioning his position in the war, ‘now it struck Kesri that in a life time 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, something that tied you to your father and mothers and those who had gone before them, back into the dimness of time. An unnameable grief came upon him then; falling to his knees he reached out to close the dead man’s eyes’²³² finds its final zenith in *The Glass Palace*, in a war happening around a hundred years later, where these very questions force both Harry and Arjun to mull over their position in history

²³⁰ Amitav Ghosh. *Flood of Fire*. India: Penguin Books Ltd., 2015, p505. Print.

²³¹ Ibid. p506.

²³² Ibid. p472.

as well as in their immediate present and influence them to act out their own destinies rather than being puppets in the army fighting a battle which is not theirs.

From its differential treatment in terms of amenities, artillery as well as pay for the Indian and the British soldiers, the army also interferes in the job market where it dissuaded men from joining indigenous armies. The army over the years became the ‘muscle-man’ to the questionable trade practices of the Company and more often than not shredded the garb of humane concerns that the British government hid behind and exposed the true mercenary and purely mercantile nature of the British enterprise and its merchants. Ghosh through the debates of the Parsee traders, who lie as both the outsider and the insider in this process, charts out the inherent hypocrisy of the situation:

...if pressed, the British government would surely find some pretext for seizing supplies of opium at gunpoint. That was the ace that was hidden up the sleeves of the Jardines, Mathesons and Dents of the world. Despite all their cackling about Free Trade, the truth was that their commercial advantages had nothing to do with markets or trade or more advanced business practices—it lay in the brute firepower of the British Empire’s guns and gunboats.²³³

Kesri’s role within the army is reminiscent of Homi Bhabha’s idea of the native ‘mimic’. Bhabha in his incisive essay remarks that, ‘colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite’²³⁴. Viewed as such, Kesri’s obsession with his uniform, his need to mould himself according to the rituals of the British all work towards creating him into an unmade project of the colonial endeavour, one whose act of being incomplete is a tacit acknowledgement of the continuance of the colonial rule. The figure of mimicry is locatable within the inner compatibility of empire and nation in a way that the national is no longer something that can be naturalized. What comes out of this process is a historical crisis in the conceptuality of the colonial man, one who becomes ‘the object of regulatory power, as the subject of racial, cultural, national representation’²³⁵. This crisis is best represented not only through the insider and yet an outsider status of Kesri but also in the making of Zachary Reid into a ‘colonial’ power. Before we delve into Zachary it is pertinent to understand the idea of the white man that he

²³³ Ibid. p484.

²³⁴ Homi K. Bhabha. ‘Of Mimicry and Man’, *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994, p122. Print.

²³⁵ Ibid. p129.

wishes to emulate, one which finds its final unravelling and breakdown in the figure of Captain Mee.

Colonial knowledge is obsessively fascinated with genealogy, conceived narrowly in genetic terms, which can only be tested and certified by official documentation. In many of the narratives which came in post the Raj discussing the lives and times of the colonial soldiers and their families within the Empire were all rooted within the genealogical structures that would affirm the right of the officers of the Empire as the rightful objects of such history. Purnima Bose in her decisive work, *Organizing Empire: Individualism, Collective Agency, and India* discusses Charles Allen's *Plain Tales from the Raj* wherein she observes, 'By establishing the lineage of his interviewees back over multiple generations and centuries, Allen legitimates the colonial presence, because the colonial domination of the subcontinent is presented as a birth right of colonial officials from elite families'²³⁶. Bose's work is pertinent when one delves into an analysis of Captain Mee's character as his genealogy itself marks him out as an outcast and becomes a decisive factor in his final destruction much before he himself becomes aware of it. Captain John Mee, the son of a shopkeeper as stated earlier, with his affable nature can only be seen as a blemish into the otherwise gentrified ranks of the officers. The English officers were very particular about the background of their peers and often this genealogy determined the social position of the officer within the cultural milieu of the Empire. Mee realises this right at the beginning of his career when, 'he had wanted to join some club in Calcutta: all the other ensigns and second lieutenants had been admitted; he alone had been blackballed'²³⁷. Kesri who realises the importance of family lineage in the army ranks tries to protect his *butcha* by creating a mythical background for Mee, one which worked on insinuations and imagined family ties: 'whenever there was any talk about Mr. Mee among the men, he always made a point of mentioning that he was "a man of good family"—*khandानी aadmi*—knowing that such things mattered as much in the sepoys' estimation of their officers as they did in their judgements of each other'²³⁸. Mee represents the middle class British families who came to the Empire as a means to break free from the rigid class distinction in their home country. Often reminding the readers of Peter Walsh from *Mrs. Dalloway*, Mee like Walsh also realises the impossibility of remaking oneself within the Empire. While for the colonized he is similar to any white man, one who is to be feared and revered, one which gives him a false sense of security of having triumphed

²³⁶ Purnima Bose. 'Heroic-Colonial Individualism', *Organizing Empire: Individualism, Collective Agency, and India*. Durham: Duke University Press 2003, p187.

²³⁷ Amitav Ghosh. *Flood of Fire*. India: Penguin Books Ltd., 2015, p199. Print.

²³⁸ *Ibid.* p199.

over the class barrier, however, among his peers as well as his home country, the moment he returns, he is relegated to the same social structure that he had tried to outrun. While for Walsh this moment of realisation comes when he returns from the Empire and realises that London has both changed and stayed the same, for Mee it comes in the form of the love affair with Catherine. Both Cathy and Mee realises that it is a love affair which is doomed from its inception and yet the lure of having finally broken the class barriers seemed too lucrative to them to not give it a try at least. It is interesting that their short love story bloomed in the picturesque town of Ranchi, which was a holiday spot for many of the British officials and their families, a space for the carnivalesque yet one that works towards reaffirming the hierarchies of the world that it is supposed to counter. The blooming of the love story that reaches its zenith in Mee and Cathy going off into the forest (the forest and its foliage being the only place where they could finally be themselves, shedding off their class positions) and its sudden death when Cathy is taken back to Calcutta and hastily married off to Burnham while forming a minuscule part of Mee's and Cathy's lives as well as the narrative, yet has an everlasting domino effect on their individual lives as well as the lives around them. Mee's refusal to get married ('Kesri knew that Mr. Mee's was no ordinary bachelorhood: he was still haunted by the lost missy'), Cathy's illegitimate affair with Zachary as well as Zachary's jealousy which leads to both their disasters, all become the ill-gotten off-springs of the thwarted relationship. Unlike a Clarissa Dalloway who realises the unfeasibility of a match with Walsh, Cathy while aware of her situation in her unhappy marriage to Burnham, still kindles in her heart the desire to be with Mee, one that she unwittingly expresses to Zachary during one of their sexual dalliances. Mee's rekindling of his romance with the now married Cathy becomes the final nail in his destruction as it is the token that Zachary utilises to get Mee to agree to an illegal deal. Ghosh, through Mee, explores how the colonial structure was not merely discriminating to the racial other but also its own who did not fit into the moulds provided by it. Mee's own words poignantly represent his sense of unbelonging when he remarks to Kesri, 'I don't know that the Pacheesi has been any better for me than it's been for you'²³⁹. Mee's suicide as much tragic is also a release as he had become a collateral and an anachronism in the scope of the Empire which systematically blinds itself to all voices that break through its garb of high rhetoric.

The other extreme of the colonial spectrum is represented through Zachary who becomes the ill-gotten by product of a system whose only language is that of profit and utility. Zachary,

²³⁹ Ibid. p206

who is conspicuously absent in the second novel, takes up the narrative space right from the early chapters of the novel where we see him serving his time as he awaits the judgement for helping the convicts to escape. It is the Zachary that we have left behind in the first novel, one who still wills to help people in distress, believes in being righteous and is often reminded of his position within the structure of the colonized space. It is an interesting starting point for the character as it further accentuates the contrast of the final Zachary Reid who becomes the partner to Burnham in his new imperial endeavour. Zachary, whose initiation into the world of the imperial other began with Serang Ali in *Sea of Poppies* moves into the Burnham household as a 'mystery' in his bid to earn money to secure his sailor's license. As Ghosh deliberately works on the world play of 'mystery' as a workman and a mysterious story, the word perfectly fits Zachary's dual role of being both the workman working in the budgerow and as the mysterious foreigner whose familial background remains in the dark throughout the series. Zachary at the beginning of the novel is also a man infatuated by the memory of his brief alliance with Paulette, one who he believes to be his soul-mate and often conjures up in his day dreams as well as in his sexual fantasies. He is spied on and caught by Mrs. Burnham during him gratifying his fantasies and is shamed for it as well as branded a patient, one who needs immediate care. Mrs. Burnham's letters as well as the books procured by her to curb Zachary's masturbation testifies to the Victorian moral structure and the prominence given to chastity and abstinence as the best virtues of men and women. Onanism or the sickness of masturbation was seen as one of the deadly diseases destroying the moral and physical fortitude of young men and one which needed to be eradicated through masculine pursuits like work, religious piety and mental certitude. This idea of curbing of sexual urges is seen in the novel in two scenarios which are far removed from each other. The first instance when abstinence is mentioned and talked of is by Kesri in the 'akhara' where it is believed that to be a good wrestler one needs to abstain from any sort of sexual act as that would help in channelling all the pent up energy into the fight. The act of abstinence from sex or any sort of sexual gratification is seen as not a religious act but rather a controlling of the dissipation of energy that one can save up and transform that into aggression. This is still a practice in most games all around the world where often during major play-offs or sporting events where wives and partners are not allowed to mingle or be with the players in order to maintain the aggression. The opposite of this utility based abstinence is the religious abstinence where any sort of sexual gratification other than one for procreation is branded as a disease which requires immediate relief. The demonization of sexual acts, especially ones involving self-gratification has been at the heart of the civilizing

mission. Taking cue from Victorian prudishness about sexuality, the Empire was rampant with missionaries as well as doctors and clergy who believed in the maintaining of chastity as the highest duty of young people and sex as only an act for procreation. However, the ground reality of the Empire was far removed from what Victorian ethos would like to believe. The Empire was seen as a morally relaxant space which facilitated sexual experimentation as well as debauchery as a compensation for the brutal climate and the working conditions. As Byron would write in *Don Juan*, 'What men call gallantry, and gods adultery/ is much more common where the climate's sultry'²⁴⁰, sexual excesses were often the most common form of past time for not only the officers in the army, but also most of the young men who had come to the Empire to make a living for themselves. With syphilis rampant as well as the proliferation of mixed race children, there was a new fetishization of celibacy and abstinence as the rightful path, away from sin and disease. This is captured in the novel through the different sermons of Doctor Allgood's lectures on the affliction (one cannot but notice the pun on the name of the doctor as well as the religious connotation of being 'good'). Mrs. Burnham's interest to civilize Zachary into being the sahib begins with the practice of abstinence and channelling that energy into creative pursuits. It is ironic that she herself begins an affair with him during one such study session. However, at this point, it is also essential to understand what brings about this affair. The affair begins as a form of retort against the sexual excesses of her husband, Mr Burnham, who as already introduced in the initial book, would indulge in bondage and spanking as a way of sexual release. This was the reason that Paulette left the Burnham mansion and becomes the motive for Mrs. Burnham to indulge into an affair with one who is lower in the social hierarchical status. Ghosh takes the affair as a springboard to comment on other repressed aspects of sexuality that plagued the Victorian self. From a detailed exposition of Mrs. Burnham's love affair with Captain Mee and its failure due to the difference in class status between them, to the passing mention of her frigidity and sexual dissatisfaction in her marriage which was, according to the norms of the time, given the name of hysteria Ghosh through Cathy Burnham's character articulates the repressed and frustrated sensibilities of the woman who is caught up between her desires and the society that needs her to be respectable. Ghosh juxtaposes the easy sexuality of the lower class and native Gulabi to the sermon bound chastity of characters like Mrs. Burnham and Paulette, thus, referring to the irony of power positions that mark the organisation of the Empire.

²⁴⁰ Lord Byron. *Don Juan* Canto 1. Poetry Foundation. Web. <<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem-alone/244638?iframe=true>> . 10.10.2015

The affair also becomes a fertile playground of a new form of sexual language that brings together English and Hindustani into a union of sexual innuendos that remain as the secret ground of convergence for the Sahib and the native. With words such as ‘lathee ready to be lagaowed’, the art of oral sex where she directs Zachary ‘You are not chewing on a chichky, and nor are you angling for a cockup! Making a chutney dear, is not a bloodsport’, their sex talk does not merely provide an aside to the structured narrative of the rest of the novel but also examines a new form of linguistic play which allows both these characters from disparate backgrounds to come together in a language that does not boast of class-specific distinctions. It is a language in which Cathy Burnham can shed her Memsahib status of respectability and be a person far removed from the masks that she must adorn as the mistress of the house. It is also a language that best represents the new generation of the colonials who remain straddled between two continents, yet cannot belong to either.

Zachary’s initiation into the opium trade is interestingly brought about by Baboo Nono Kissan who sees himself as the harbinger of the new world order, a new epoch of consumerism that aims at accumulation of wealth at the cost of destruction of all other forms of life and orders. Zachary’s interest in the trade and his introductory visit to the Opium Exchange house in the heart of Calcutta is presented akin to describing a man’s first foray into a sexual intercourse. Ghosh describes Zachary’s first reaction to the Exchange as ‘Zachary’s pulse quickened at the thought that fortunes could be made and lost in this dirty little alley. Through the odour of dust and dung he recalled the perfumed scents of Mrs Burnham’s boudoir. So this was the mud in which such luxuries were rooted? The idea was strangely arousing’²⁴¹. A few pages later, as he witnesses the auction on its way, Zachary is not merely taken by the flurry of activities but by the sensuality that such an act of fierce trade represents for an outsider like him:

Even though Zachary couldn’t quite follow what was going on, he soon found himself caught up in the excitement. There was something wild about the way the men were bidding, jumping up and down, waving their hands and shouting: it reminded him of a melee in a tavern—even the smell was similar, a rancid brew of sweat, fear and ambition...By the time the last lot of opium was sold Zachary was drenched in sweat...he felt drained; no less spent than he was after a bout of love-making. Only in

²⁴¹ Ibid. p271

bed with Mrs Burnham had he felt such a fierce onrush of passion. It was as if his hoarded essence had at last found the true object of its desire.²⁴²

It is interesting to note that there has been a definitive shift in the consciousness of Zachary, a transference of emotional anchorage from the person to the product—the hallmark of consumerist behaviour. Sexualizing the process of trade has always been an important aspect of the new consumerism wherein the unquenchable greed of the consumer is likened to the orgasmic release of a sexual intercourse. This is one of the first points in the novel where the readers are given a glimpse of the unmaking of the earlier Zachary, one who is invested in people to a new form of Frankensteinian Monster that blames no one other than its maker for its discretions: ‘I have become what you wanted, Mrs Burnham... You wanted me to be a man of the times, did you not? And that is what I am now; I am a man who wants more and more and more; a man who does not know the meaning of “enough”. Anyone who tries to thwart my desires is the enemy of my liberty and must expect to be treated as such’²⁴³.

Zachary presents a very interesting subversion of the civilizing mission where the need to rescue the heathenish man from the Dark Continent always seem to have fallen short of letting the man be an equal. Taking from Bhabha’s postulations about the native as the poor copy of the colonizer, Zachary brings into discussion the possibility of a new set of men who are not merely enamoured by the discriminatory practices but one that sees it as a harbinger of a new sensibility of freedom and individuality. Zachary’s movement from being a marginalised youth who has to hide his origins in order to be hired to the blackmailing opium trader who sees his actions as an exercise of his right charts the history of consumerist and neo-colonial culture that sees difference as problematic and all actions as driven by a motive of conquest is a study of contrasts that is made possible in the consumption-driven new social order. He overturns the usual colonial discourse that ‘produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an “other” and yet entirely knowable and visible’²⁴⁴ into a narrative of mimic men who are the terrifying excesses of the colonial culture. It has to be remembered that even though Zachary might look like a white man, he was the illegitimate son of a white master, born out of an affair with a plantation slave (his last name ‘Black’ had to be changed to Reid when he was made a captain of Ibis in the first novel). Zachary’s background makes

²⁴² Ibid. p274-5

²⁴³ Ibid. p582

²⁴⁴ Homi K. Bhabha. ‘The Other Question’. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994 p101. Print.

him an interesting choice as a protagonist as like Eliza Doolittle²⁴⁵ he becomes the point of unravelling of the colonizer's discourse of racial supremacy. It is noteworthy that Ghosh shows the first part of the war on China and its various nuances through the view point of Zachary: one who lies beyond the machinery of the White man and yet is an intrinsic part of it. Zachary's amazement as well as sense of gratitude to be allowed to be a part of this 'age of the explorer' discovering and taming the continents of darkness lies in sharp contrast to his own familial history of persecution by the same self-serving explorers. His gratuity towards his mentors of this transition becomes more ironic as he would go on to overpower those very individuals, let it be Mr Burnham that he cuckolds or Mrs Burnham whom he drives to suicide.

One of the main concerns that *Flood of Fire* hinges on is the nuances of Free Trade and its moral, ethical and economic effects which resonate through history right into our present. At the end of the eighteenth century, as Britain was undergoing the industrial revolution, it was seeking newer markets for its increased production capacities. As the British workers were now drawn from the countries to the factories and set to rigorous mechanised lives, they were encouraged to drink more tea rather than beer as a pastime drink. This led to an increase of demand for Chinese tea in Britain along with silks. China was naturally seen as a new opportunity for trade expansions; and with the East India Company already having set base in India, setting up of trade relations with China was considered the next logical step in this new production revolution. To prevent a trade imbalance, the British tried to sell more of their own products to China, but there was not much demand for heavy woollen fabrics in a country accustomed to either cotton padding or silk.

The only solution was to increase the amount of Indian goods to pay for these Chinese luxuries, and increasingly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the item provided to China was Bengal opium. Greater opium supplies had naturally resulted in an increase in demand and usage throughout the country, in spite of repeated prohibitions by the Chinese government and officials. The British did all they could to increase the trade: they bribed officials, helped the Chinese work out elaborate smuggling schemes to get the opium into China's interior, and distributed free samples of the drug to innocent victims.

²⁴⁵ One of the most iconic characters created by George Bernard Shaw, Eliza Doolittle appears in in the play *Pygmalion* (1913) as a flower girl who is groomed by Higgins to infiltrate into high society. The play is a satirical commentary on the sham of upper class society and its behavioural patterns.

The cost to China was enormous. The drug weakened a large percentage of the population (some estimate that 10 percent of the population regularly used opium by the late nineteenth century), and silver began to flow out of the country to pay for the opium.²⁴⁶ Ghosh gives a detailed view of the Chinese answer to this drug problem in *River of Smoke*, ushering in the ideas of freedom and moral responsibility and showing how they become mere puppets in the hands of the traders and *Flood of Fire* stands as a testimony to the destructive nature of such a trade ethic. Britain mustered up western military weapons, including percussion lock muskets, heavy artillery, and paddlewheel gunboats which were far superior to China's. Britain's troops had recently been toughened in the Napoleonic wars, and Britain could muster garrisons, warships, and provisions from its nearby colonies in Southeast Asia and India. The result was a disaster for the Chinese. By the summer of 1842 British ships were victorious and were even preparing to shell the old capital, Nanking (Nanjing), in central China. The emperor therefore had no choice but to accept the British demands and sign a peace agreement. This agreement, the first of the 'unequal treaties,' opened China to the West and marked the beginning of Western exploitation of the nation. The disastrous effect of this war is most succinctly stated by Neel when he comments,

How was it possible that a small number of men, in the span of a few hours or minutes, could decide the fate of millions of people yet unborn? How was it possible that the outcome of those brief moments could determine who would rule whom, who would be rich or poor, master or servant, for generations to come?

Nothing could be a greater injustice, yet such had been the reality ever since human beings first walked on earth.²⁴⁷

While Ghosh, through his mouth piece character Neel, is immensely critical of the doctrine of Free Trade and what it entails for those who remain at the receiving end of it, he also condemns China's suspicious disposition towards foreigners, which has its historical inception with problems with the Dutch, often acting as a hindrance to its own betterment. The years of mistrust among the South Asian countries as well as their inhabitants, which is succinctly captured in the anecdote about the Gurkhas—their military plans to attack Bengal in order for the British to withdraw from China and defend Bengal is not supported by the Chinese, which in turn leads to a concentrated attack on China—reinforces the divisive

²⁴⁶ The Opium War and Foreign Encroachment. Web . <
http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1750_opium.htm>. 15.06.2016.

²⁴⁷ Amitav Ghosh. *Flood of Fire*. India: Penguin Books Ltd., 2015, p388. Print

politics of the South Asian countries which have often been used by the foreigners to their advantage. The novel also criticises the absolute disconnect between the ruling class and the common Chinese people, which internally divides the country into factions. Ghosh cleverly juxtaposes this detachment with the righteous sermon of Free Trade ('Let us not forget that at the heart of this conflict lie two precious and inviolable values, freedom and dignity. This war will be fought not only to liberate the Sons of Han from Manchu tyranny, but also to protect our own dignity',²⁴⁸) that is taken up by the merchants and its efficacy in a country whose ruler is seen as not the friend of the people but rather a despotic tyrant completely out of sync with its subjects. However, this juxtaposition works at two levels as it does not only critique the Chinese governance but also exposes the reality of the opium trade. The jargon-driven language of Free Trade completely eradicates the voice of the victim, the common addict. 'It is all for their own good'²⁴⁹ that seems to be the catch-phrase of the foreign traders point out the inherent misguided logic of rationality and goodness that pervades all discussions about the ethical possibilities of such trade. Putting the onus of truth on the victim, the doctrine of Free Trade infantilizes the intellectual position of the Other through a rhetoric of the Other's insurmountable gullibility and refusal to understand what is good for itself.

In this crisis of ideas, Neel ponders over the role of the intellectual. Neel's character from the first novel onward takes on an interesting trajectory, from being the indifferent Raja, to being convict at sea, taking up the role of Munshi to Bahram and finally in this, taking over the role of advisor to the Chinese on Indian matters. While Neel's love for words and languages as well as cultures makes him an excellent narrator of the crisis of the opium war, he is also the frustrated intellectual who helplessly watches the destruction of not only a civilization but also its future. His words, 'Thoughts, books, ideas, words—if anything they make you more alone, because they destroy whatever instinctive loyalties you may once have possessed',²⁵⁰ brings out the inherent loneliness and angst of the intellectual in times of ideological emergency. Unlike his other narrators in his earlier works, Neel is not an absent present future that looks at the past with introspection and retrospective knowledge; he is an equal participant in the saga whose fate is indelibly intertwined with the history that is in the making around him.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p437

²⁴⁹ Ibid. p376

²⁵⁰ Ibid.p83

A secondary strand in the novel is the journey taken by Neel's son Raj Rattan in finding his father. Raj Rattan's journey through the black waters, being part of the army as a fifer and his search for his father to legitimize his own self, become the microcosmic representation of the larger concern of legitimization and the concept of home that the novel grapples with.

Flood of Fire vindicates Ghosh to some extent from being often tainted with the stigma of creating women characters that are a shadow of their male counterparts and lacking zeal. The four major women characters in the novel, Shireen, Catherine Burnham, Paulette and the absent present Deeti, not only become mistresses of their own fates but also the catalysts of change in this overwhelmingly masculine enterprise. Each of them carries forth the burden of representing their own selves to a world that is used to seeing the woman as a shadow of the male figures in their lives. They are all mobile and their mobility is not a passive movement as companions of others, but ones which actively decide their position within the social structures. However, their roles remain fraught with problems in terms of representation as well as their position within the overwhelmingly masculine narrative, a discussion of which is taken up in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The Ibis' journey into a new world with Neel, Serang Ali and the other un-accommodated beings within the scope of the nationalistic narrative becomes an interesting open ending to a trilogy that invests itself into unpacking the multitudinous meanings of belonging and alienation. The trilogy unravels a history of movements, travels and intercultural crossings that redefine the concepts of space and geographies within the modern age. The innumerable instances of contact stand as stark contrasts to the modern day problematic of the sealing of borders as well as understanding of the 'other'. If viewed through the present day prism of validation of ancient pasts to examine one's claim over space as well as identity with one's homeland, Ghosh's trilogy becomes an important point of study and reflection about histories and the roles they play in decoding present day politics. Delinking cultures from the grounded structures of territories and topographies, Ghosh insists in his narrative that cultures are created beyond the edified notions of history and its chain of causality; that cultures are in truth volatile and always adjusting to the power regimes that dictates it.

The trilogy also stands as a report on the ideals of new consumerism that aims as closing of borders through a discourse of negation of identities, creating dichotomies of 'us' and 'them',

'free' and 'closed', politics of 'Right' and 'Left'. While on one hand the three novels expose the hollow rhetoric of Free Trade and righteous liberty, equality, it also is severely critical of the sense of suspicion and the disconnect that remains the mainstay of the South Asian polity. Focussing on the contrasts rather than the uniformity of cultures, the trilogy presents the intellectual and aesthetic stance championing divergence in cultural experiences. However, in its drive to accumulate the divergent politics of the different sub-groups what the Trilogy unwittingly does is to fall into the trap of turning its characters into stereotypes of the world that they represent. Serving no more than mouthpieces of certain ideological stands, characters like Zachary, Ah Fatt, Mr Burnham, Paulette remain as caricatures of the good and bad foreigners peppering the narrative to justify its ends. Even for characters like Mrs Burnham, the palate of the narrative provides too less a space for appreciative study of her position except in the narrow terms of the bored housewife, the adulteress wife and the star-crossed lover who needs to die for the universe around her to settle into its pre-destined monotony. The '*pralay*' that Nobo Kissin and Taramony foretell at the beginning of the first part of the Trilogy, does come to its fruition in the finale with the apocalyptic breakdown of China as well as the rise of the new consciousness of the Indian soldier moulding him towards the new ideas of freedom and independence, it is also the dawn of a new consumerist society where societies are determined through their authority to control or be subservient to the powers of an economic platform whose sole determinant factor is exploitation. Trying to capture the 'poetics of history' from below', the trilogy might often fail in creating a justified space for all the different forgotten histories it had resolved to re-tell, but it stands as an important piece of fictional work that often delves into the real world of newspaper reports, archival pieces to bring forth a deviating and contrary world view which History in its project of nationalistic rendering often pushes into oblivion. Exposing the power structures that determine retelling of the past coloured in falsified hues of glory, honour and other such hyperbolic rhetoric, the Ibis Trilogy presents a panoramic view of a world order that is slowly extricating itself from the unmarked grave that History had relegated it to, in order to lay its claim on a future that is dangerously moving towards a moment of panic and violence of exploitative politics.

Chapter 5

Unravelling the Traces- the politics of representing the ‘Other’

Representation has always been a point of contention in postcolonial studies as it is plagued by questions with no easy answers: questions that raise doubts over the very act of representation that postcolonial fiction has taken upon itself. The questions of who are being represented? Are there languages that can articulate the unrepresentable? Can the ‘other’ be represented in a discourse that is not his own? And if yes, what is the potential violence associated with such representation? ‘How can agency be expressed and recognised when the medium of its expression is not the agent’s?’²⁵¹ are entry points into the discourse of efficacy of postcolonial studies itself. Struggling against the colonial archive that presents the history of the colonies in a moment of amnesia and blindness towards the actual reality of the subaltern, postcolonial studies has made a conscious effort to decolonise the cultural domain through a critique of the colonial record and a counter demonstration is how things really were and are. As James Duncan and David Leycall would suggest, postcolonial narratives need theorization of a situated geographical imagination that can problematize description, unpack dominant ideologies of space and time, and deconstruct hidden geographies of the topography of the colonized²⁵². Postcolonial narratives have sought to form an alternate to the historiography of the colonial archive through a reassessment and reconfiguration of the individual self presented in the colonial setup. This has come in two waves, the initial wave in the late 1950s and the second wave which began in post-Rushdiean 1980s. As evinced through the discussions in the earlier chapters, the first wave invested itself in adopting the colonial narrative from the point of view of the colonized. Often referred to as an ‘answering back’ to the Empire, these narratives however suffer from the condition of being uni-dimensional in their scope of realising the full potential of the colonized self and instead

²⁵¹ Tabish Khair. ‘The Example of Amitav Ghosh: (Re) Establishing Connections’. *Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels*. New Delhi: Oxford India Press, 2001, p302. Print.

²⁵² James Duncan and David Ley. Eds. *Place/Culture/Representation*. London: Routledge, 1993. Print.

herding them all under the representative and often debilitating term of being the colonial other, the postcolonial.

1980 onwards there has been a conscious effort to move away from the umbrella terms favoured by the first wave and instead moulding postcoloniality into a celebration of a conscious acknowledgement of differences. To successfully challenge the dominant hegemonies, this second wave realised the need for recognising that different places create different individuals and have confronted and lived through the time-space colonization in diverse ways. Therefore, there has been a renewed emphasis on local, regional and particular places of subjectivity where these sites are valorised as points of political and cultural resistance. Ghosh belongs to this second wave of writers who emphasize on the understanding of the local and its practices to develop a model of an alternate space for histories which have been suppressed or forgotten. In his eight fictional work which have been discussed in the earlier chapters and his non-fictional work, Ghosh consciously deconstructs the historical archive from within to create narratives which provide an opening into contesting areas of knowledge. His narratives refuse to play the game of binaries that early wave of Postcolonialism indulged in; instead his narratives reiterate multiple times the need to free oneself from the binaries and participate in the diverse divergent universe that such readings carry within themselves. Peppering his narrative with figures from the different reaches of the colonial world, Ghosh's world of fiction has the subalterns and their ghosts playing alongside with gusto with their colonial counterparts. While often the colonial power operators are treated much with disdain and are often in danger of becoming stereotypes or caricatures in some of his novels, his narrators are invested in bringing out the nuances of the subalterns with much more faithfulness, sometimes even at the cost of the plotline. Through such readings, Ghosh wants to bring to the forefront the 'figure glimpsed in a rear-view mirror'²⁵³ of the new theory of the nation and situate it in its rightful place in the annals of history. However, the problem with such a project is one that forms the basis of the inherent failure that marks the postcolonial project. The thematics of existence of the subaltern or the oppressed culture through challenging the authority of the colonial discourse while being a staple of his fiction becomes also the point of access to the representational politics that it indulges in. As stated earlier, postcolonial narratives aim at representing an absence, a silence which have been suppressed or forgotten or fallen through the cracks of the colonial archive. Such a project, even though ambitious and well-meaning has to navigate itself through two

²⁵³ Amitav Ghosh. *The Hungry Tide*. New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005 p 220. Print.

major obstacles as envisaged by Neil Lazarus: a) historiographic b) epistemological. Lazarus in his decisive work, *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, charts out the pitfalls that threaten and often converts the postcolonial narrative into its nemesis, the colonial archive. Dividing the problem of representation in postcolonial narrative under the two broad rubrics of the historiographic and the epistemological, Lazarus examines if a true representation of the voiceless, the silenced and the forgotten is possible. Expounding on the problem of the historiographic, Lazarus remarks,

Sometimes the information that the writer needs has been lost—whether intentionally, in the sense that it has been destroyed as a matter of official policy (often the case where colonial policing was concerned, for instance, and specifically where this involved the systematic use of torture), or more casually, as the effect (not least through time) of the uneven social distribution of power: records have not been kept, memory has died, dominant hegemonic narratives have rendered subordinate or subaltern narratives irretrievable, and so on. At other times, information exists, but is so compromised by its tendentiousness that even where it stands alone it can only be approached through means of a symptomatic reading.²⁵⁴

Naming this loss as *chose du texte*, Lazarus goes on to state that the gap that remains in this loss cannot be read in any other terms other than that of appropriation. In spite of the numerous documents or chronicles of the times which serve the author as interlocutors, these still cannot guarantee or afford an access into the consciousness of those living that history, living under the tyranny of discourses that have more often than not chosen to delete them. The questions of what it feels to be defeated, to be besieged, how that reacts to the oppressed's sense of time and space cannot be read. What instead is available is a knowledge which is 'only approached, never rendered, by the words written by the various chroniclers. It lies, one could say, on the other side of the silence that these words themselves memorialise and to which they even contribute' (118). Therefore the postcolonial narrative with its aim of including the ones which have been forgotten or glossed over, a project of setting the records straight, takes the form of a counter-representation that becomes as contrived as the colonial representation that it had set out to debunk and demolish. It must be understood as an

²⁵⁴ Neil Lazarus. "'A figure glimpsed in a rear-view mirror': the question of representation in 'postcolonial' fiction", *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011 p117-8. Print.

‘*appropriation*, that is to say, an in the first instance politically contingent *invention*, rather than as *recovery* or *retrieval*’ (123)²⁵⁵.

The second problem in representation that Lazarus looks into is epistemological. He opines, ‘Scholars in postcolonial studies have tended to address Eurocentrism less in terms of ideology and more as an episteme...Eurocentrism emerges on this conceptualisation as an untranscendable horizon governing thought—its forms, contents, modalities, and presuppositions so deeply and insidiously layered and patterned that they cannot be circumvented, only deconstructed. And in these terms it is not susceptible to critique, since it is entailed in the very fabric of disciplinarity and institutionalised knowledge production’ (127). This is reiterative of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s argument that Europe and its knowledge systems invariable becomes the centre of the decolonisation process, as the very forms of criticism are all Eurocentric. The tools of deconstructing the archive and re-engaging with the *chose du texte* or the lost text are ironically products of the same system which had led to the losing of the text and its context in the first place. Therefore even in the most ethnocentric descriptions, the models of analysis, explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly hark to the same order which it has been trying to demolish or contest. The lost text of the invisible silenced pasts in such a case, is constantly constructed keeping in mind the parameters that have to be adhered to for it to be taken as a serious contender against the edified knowledge of the historical archive. Hence the ‘presence’ of the lost text becomes ironically the object of an objectifying gaze whenever it suffers representation.

Representation of the *chose du texte* becomes enmeshed in a catch-22 situation where either it becomes a specification of absence or deficiency (as in the colonial narratives or in narratives working from the point of view of the Eurocentric episteme) or a reactive (Ethnocentric) specification of presence or plenitude as the determinate opposite of the prior Eurocentric representation. As Lazarus points out, ‘there is a kind of not so much inauthenticity, but ideological deformation taking place whenever representation is at issue’²⁵⁶.

Ghosh’s novels while trying to work around the two problems sketched out by Lazarus often fall into similar traps of representational politics. Ghosh in his various interviews, one of which has been discussed in the first chapter, has been vocal about his choice of fiction over history writing as it offers him avenues of exploration into cultures and anthropological

²⁵⁵ Emphasis as on the original text.

²⁵⁶ Neil Lazarus. “‘A figure glimpsed in a rear-view mirror’: the question of representation in ‘postcolonial’ fiction”, *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011 p138. Print.

details which are often lost in the historical project due to the two points enumerated earlier. However, in spite of the free-wheeling structure and potential made available by the platform of fiction-writing, Ghosh's narrator and by extension he as a chronicler of the subaltern histories of the subcontinent often fall victims to the constraints of representation. The rationale utilised to these representational acts of those who 'have been un-or under-represented in histories and narratives hitherto' also consist within them a systematic violence that in claiming the agency and subjectivity of the marginalised often lose sight of their actual voices and stories. Creating universes peopled with characters who converse in and about times and spaces of the pasts which are no longer available in History, the authenticity of the experience is quite often in Ghosh's narratives taken over by his philosophical need to create a structure of defiance against the official systems of knowledge. Ghosh follows Edward Said's concept that the intellectual (a figure that often plays a dominant role in his narratives) is an individual endowed with the faculty for 'representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to as well as for a public' and that the fundamental responsibility of the said intellectual is to always 'represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug'²⁵⁷. However, the intellectual in his narrative often co-opts the voice of the 'Other' and in the process edifies a structure of alternate knowledge that becomes equally constricting and exclusive. This chapter would explore this problematic of representation endemic in most of Ghosh's narratives through the four broad avenues of figures and languages of marginality as presented in his eight fictional work: firstly, the figure of the bastard; second the myriad women who form the base of his narratives and their expressions of self; thirdly, the fringe and peripheral figures of the subalterns who remain just outside articulation and finally the evolution of the language utilised to represent these figures.

A child who brought disgrace? The position of the bastard in Ghosh's literary universe

The illegitimate child has been an oft used trope in literature to represent a twilight zone between classes, castes as well as through the figure of the unaccommodated child figure comment on the stringent divisions that form the base of civilised society. While Ghosh's novels are often overrun by figures of the inquisitive child, let it be the narrator in SL or Tutul in HT or a Rajkumar in HT, the figure of the bastard finds place in two works, GP and

²⁵⁷ Edward W. Said. *Representations of the Intellectual*. London: Vintage, 1994 p11. Mentioned in Neil Lazarus. "'A figure glimpsed in a rear-view mirror': the question of representation in 'postcolonial' fiction", *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011 p138. Print.

the Ibis Trilogy. While in GP Ilongo in spite of being a figure of intrigue occupies minimum space in a narrative that follows multiple characters, in Ibis Trilogy Ghosh introduces a range of bastard children, all products of an exploitative system and ones who find it impossible to assimilate. In *Sea of Poppies* we are introduced to Ah Fatt, the opium addict fellow prisoner of Neel who helps Neel along with Madhoo and Serang Ali to escape from the convict ship. Here in Ghosh also introduces us to another bastard figure, Zachary Smith, who interestingly even bastardizes his name as he sails in search of his fortunes. In *River of Smoke*, we are introduced to a second bastard figure, Robin Chinnery who becomes the chronicler of the vibrant world of the Hongks in China. The only woman figure to have made into this list of illegitimacy is Adelie, the beautiful mistress of Ah Fatt who leads to both their doom. Each of these figures represents a different junction of the colonial enterprise as well as work as individuals caught up in the questions of identity determination. Emerging in the narratives at points of crisis, these characters, all but a Zachary who is most assimilated in his manner into the dominant hegemonic system, fade out of the narrative at critical junctures where they are just becoming major players into effecting change in the narrative strategies. It is remarkable how each of these unaccommodated figures remain fringe characters in narratives which ironically set out to upset the status quo of dominant normative narratives of social structures. Ilongo, the bastard child of Rajkumar, makes his first appearance in the novel as a ghost-like figure that shadows Uma as she visits the rubber plantations in Rangoon. Their meeting scene has a surreal quality attached to it, taking it away from the everyday functioning of the narrative:

On one of these early morning walks, Uma became aware that she was being followed. She looked over her shoulder, and saw a figure slipping out of view... The next day, hearing the crackle of leaves behind her, it was she who hid herself. This time she was able to catch a glimpse of him in the distance: it was a boy, thin, lanky and dark. He was dressed in a shirt and checked sarong.²⁵⁸

It is imperative to note that the first two adjectives to describe Ilongo are ‘figure slipping out of view’ and a figure viewed at a distance: it is an interesting rejoinder to the fact that in the narrative he will always be viewed at from the distance and will remain in the shadows of the plantation—the space of both of his abuse as well as his freedom. While he carries a striking

²⁵⁸ Amitav Ghosh. *The Glass Palace*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000 p.234. Print.

physical resemblance to Rajkumar, there is almost a forced amnesia on almost all the characters to acknowledge the similarity, much like a bad film plot where it is evident to everyone but the characters on screen that this figure carries a secret with him. While Uma, equally an outsider in the world of the plantations, is quick to decipher the secret and is chagrined when Ilongo's mother disallows her to disclose their secret to Dolly as Rajkumar has been faithful in providing monetary support for Ilongo, it is absurd in terms of narrative strategy that such an interesting and explosive narrative trope is cut off post such an insubstantial reasoning. Ghosh as an author, almost seems to be more invested in maintaining the sanctity of the institutionalised family and sees Rajkumar's discretion not as one which is in line with the millions of women workers who face abuse at the hands of their employers, but almost as a causal effect for the fact that Dolly had lost interest in conjugal relations post Dinu's illness. Ilongo is all but forgotten in the narrative and most infuriatingly never makes a claim for a place in the plantation that he has an equal right over as Neel. In a narrative that is unravelling the silences around atrocities of space and time that have been conveniently forgotten by History as it undercuts history's claim of glorious march towards a unified future, it is extremely ironic that a figure like Ilongo remains in the fringes, one who becomes a personification of similar family histories that in the quest for normative acceptance often become abysses for the violence of the past, most remarkably represented through the bastard child, to be buried in. Ilongo is often reduced to being a glorified driver, caretaker for Morningside where in the plantations he and his mother lives and even when he is found by Dinu as he is 'addressing the assembly, standing on a chair, speaking in Tamil' (384) to the workers in the plantation, thus hinting towards a bigger role he might play in the narrative, it is quickly snuffed out as he is thrown into the narrative sidelines. It is important to note that while Dinu chooses to spend a night at Ilongo's house and knows about their connection as half-brothers, yet in retelling the stories of wartime Burma to Jaya, he is quick to remember and know the final days and sentiments of an Arjun who is all but a stranger to him than Ilongo who does not even find a mention in the final tying up of ends of the different storylines.

A similar fate befalls the character of Robin Chinnery, the painter who situates himself in the din of the opium trade at the Thirteen Hongs and becomes the chronicler of a different form of exchange that lies beyond the exploitative world of the commercial realm: the horticultural exchange and the art project related to it. Chinnery is shown to be the bastard child of the famed painter George Chinnery who fathers children with his housemaid and abandons this

family as well as his legal family at the first instance of trouble. Robin grows up to be a quirky yet accomplished artist who initially falls into forging his father's painting for money and when caught finds refuge in the offshores of Canton. Chinnery plays the role of the chronicler of the 'other' in the heavily masculine space of Fanqui-town as he describes the place in terms of an artistic scroll, bringing into the scene the way the scenery, the buildings, the everyday hustle all contributed in the multi-faceted experience that Fanqui-town boasts of. Much like his own illegitimacy, Chinnery finds a sense of belonging into this world which refuses to look into lineage or family background as the only token of acceptance and instead encourages identity built through one's own actions. Chinnery's art and his search for the elusive flower stand as an antithesis to the structured and exploitative contours of the trade rules between the Chinese and the Empire. His assimilation into the world of the scroll painters presents as a direct contrast to the refusal of the British officials like Slade and Jardine to accept the business models of the Hong merchants, a refusal that leads to the final Opium War. His interest in the painting of the mutilated human body with empathy as practised by Jacqua and his ilk is an interesting alternate to the disgust that is often associated with the non-perfect body in the artist's world—known to the western world as 'bastard art'²⁵⁹ this is a form of expression that seems to Chinnery the most honest examination of the human condition, much like the position of the bastard in the social universe of the Empire. Chinnery's art in the narrative grows more nuanced as well as urgent as the Opium trade comes to a standstill; its urgency draws succour from the forms of art which would soon be lost in the din of global commercial trade exploitation. It is important to note that even though Chinnery is a cross-dresser and as can be interpreted from his words, a homosexual, yet these angles are swept under the greater rug of his artistic capabilities. Even though he is the main chronicler of the life in Fanqui-town in the narrative, yet there is a curious silence about the nuances of his life or the effects of it in Fanqui-town. Ghosh at certain points does refer to the 'brotherhood' of the men there, yet in terms of sexual representation, there is a sense of orthodoxy while speaking about it—represented through euphemism, indirect gestures or a complete overlooking of it. As Chinnery poses to become a bigger part of the narrative as China readies itself for war, Ghosh just like he does with Ilongo, relegates him to the side lines and completely erases him from the narrative in *Flood of Fire*. It is fitting that even though he vanishes from the narrative with the burning down of the Thirteen Hongs, yet it is his rendition of the Fanqui-town that remains as a defiant act against the obliterating

²⁵⁹ Amitav Ghosh. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2011 p248. Print.

forces of history—much like his own self which refuses to be relegated into the shadows even though the author intends him to do so.

Ah Fatt or Freddie (the Anglophone name that he adopts to avoid detection) and Zachary who also adopts an Anglophone surname Smith to blend in, form the two extremes of the spectrum that represent the fate of the illegitimate children within the Empire. Ah Fatt is introduced to the readers in *Sea of Poppies* as a lice encrusted addict that Neel has been assigned to share his prison cell with, he is described to Neel as his ‘destiny’ his ‘Aafat’²⁶⁰—the fate he cannot escape. It is an ironic statement on Neel’s predicament as it will be Ah Fatt who will not be able to outgrow or outrun his already doomed fate. Ah Fatt’s position as the outsider is one which has been decided by virtue of his birth—the child of a Parsee businessman and a boatwoman, he is unwelcome in both the communities and this sense of abandonment becomes the driving force in determining the way his story unfolds. While Bahram tries to assimilate him into the fold by trying to ‘set himself up as a gentleman of good standing: the boy was to be erudite, active, and urbane, as handy with rod and gun as with book and pen; a Man who spouted Manliness like a whale exhales spray’(420) yet, the reality of the situation that stares Ah Fatt in the eye and deepens his sense of unbelonging is when ‘schools refused to accept the illegitimate son of a boatwoman’ (420), the fact that ‘he would plead to visit his father’s homeland. But this was the one indulgence Barry could not grant...it would be like unloosing an army of termites on the parqueted floors of his Churchgate mansion’(421). This feeling of rejection is so ingrained in the character that even in obtaining his most desired wish of being accepted within the folds of his father’s family, as Shireen wishes to adopt him as the legitimate son of Bahram, he cannot reconcile himself with his new accepted self and displays *thanatos* that warns the readers of his final doom. Ah Fatt’s constant dreams of seeing the dead Bahram and Che Mei reiterates the supernatural angle that represents a departure from the logic and rationality driven nature of the colonial narrative and infuses the alternate histories with a power of lying beyond the grasp of the causal structuring of the mainstream. These dreams also explore the influence of the drug which spreads itself into being myriad signifiers—opium as the centre of a war which would decide the future of a nation and the fate of the Empire, opium as also the substance which acts as a gateway to reach a past which is not available through rationalistic historic discourse; it instead enables visions that are allowed to only those who are ready to annihilate themselves in the process. Ah Fatt’s death is both unexpected as well as unnecessary in

²⁶⁰ Amitav Ghosh. *Sea of Poppies*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2008 p 316. Print.

furthering the storyline. In spite of the different layers that he brings in, in terms of his friendship with Neel, his problematic relationship with Bahram and his furthering depression, his character is reduced to being a tokenistic representation of the idea of the ‘Other’—one who serves the purpose of bringing in the alternate histories but who also needs to be policed as it threatens to expose the author’s own prejudices and inbuilt knowledge structures.

Zachary stands as the opposite of Ah Fatt in the way he is assimilated into the narrative. A plantation worker’s son who is the product of sexual abuse of his mother by the plantation owner, Zachary boasts of a similar background as has been granted to Ilongo, yet he is more proactive in making it work as an advantage to further his position in the narrative world. Zachary’s graph as a character, as has been extensively discussed in chapter four, overcomes the hurdles of belonging not only by virtue of his invested knowledge of human psyche but also due to his skin colour and his command over the language of English, one that guarantees him a position within the upper echelons of the Empire. However, as discussed earlier, Zachary’s character build-up seems to be swinging between the two extremes of good and bad, making him into almost a figure of caricature who transforms within the novel from a wide-eyed and righteous hero to an anti-hero who would not deter from even eliciting for revenge sex from a woman whom he had claimed to be in love with, driving her to suicide. Zachary’s character suffers from those same excesses that the other illegitimate figures in Ghosh’s narratives fall prey to—either they are unceremoniously taken off from the plot of the narrative or they turn themselves into Frankensteinian Monster figure who needs to be curtailed.

Adelie, the only woman to figure in the list of illegitimate children and their fate of being unaccommodated within the two worlds that they wish to lay their claim on. While Ah Fatt desires to be a ‘Great Man’ like his father, for someone like Adelie no option other than being the mistress of a drug smuggler, Dai Lou is available. Described as ‘salt-prawn food’ by Ah Fatt, Adelie also boasts of a mixed parentage: ‘Her mother from Goa, but live in Macau. Her father Chinese, from Canton’²⁶¹. Her beauty becomes her only currency to barter in order to secure a living, however, she realises the futility of her position as she yearns for a land and a family that can never be achieved, one whose achievement is the deferred goal of the self. Adelie’s affair with Ah Fatt and her consequent suicide expresses how gender also plays a

²⁶¹ Amitav Ghosh. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2011 p93. Print.

catalyst in determining the role of the illegitimate child—for the woman, self-willed death is an easier choice than life.

There are other bastard characters like Karthamma's son in COR and Dicky in *Flood of Fire*, but they hardly have a role within the context of the narrative structures and are often relegated to being secondary characters.

Representing Women: the problem of the free woman

Ghosh's narratives have a multitude of women characters involved in different modes and stages of the universe of the chronicles yet Ghosh as an author has often been charged with being misogynistic in his representation of women. It is an interesting conundrum which requires a little background into the modes of representation that Ghosh utilises in his novels. As opposed to the male camaraderie as evinced in postcolonial fiction, Ghosh's narratives in many cases involve in presenting tales of female bonding and friendships that are daring, divergent as well as enlightening. Let it be Uma and Dolly in GP, Dolly and the Princesses in GP, Piya and Moyna in HT, Cathy and Paulette in *Sea of Poppies*, Cathy and Shireen in *Flood of Fire*, Urmila and Shonali in CC, Deeti and the other girmitiya women in the Ibis, female companionships abound in his texts. These friendships are independent of the other strong female characters that people Ghosh's novels like Ila, Thamma, Neelima, Zindi and the others, who are discussed a little later in this. For the purpose of this chapter, I will be taking just three of these examples to further the argument I am trying to make—Uma and Dolly, Cathy and Paulette, and Urmila and Shonali.

Uma and Dolly, one the rebellious wife of the Collector and the other the servant cum handmaiden of the Burmese Royal Family strike an exceedingly interesting relationship with each other, one which transcends the usual bases atop which friendships are built—matters of class, caste, personal preferences. Dolly and Uma, throughout the narrative act as foils to each other as well as pose as goals for the other to achieve. Their friendship is an outlet for both of them from the roles that they are accustomed to play. It is a relationship where both understand each other's position and the social structures that keeps them chained as well as sets them free. They serve as mirrors to each other's misgivings and doubts about not only personal dilemmas but also the greater political set up that they are a part of. An interesting example of this symbiotic relationship is presented when they talk about power structures and the violence associated with them:

Uma remarked: 'One hears some awful things about Queen Supalyat.'

'What?'

'That she had a lot of people killed...in Mandalay... Doesn't it frighten you,' she said, 'to be living in the same house as someone like that?'

Dolly was quiet for a moment and Uma began to worry that she'd offended her. Then Dolly spoke up. 'You know, Uma', she said in her softest voice. 'Every time I come to your house, I notice that picture you have, hanging by your front door...'

'Of Queen Victoria, you mean?'

'Yes.'

Uma was puzzled. 'What about it?'

'Don't you sometimes wonder how many people have been killed in Queen Victoria's name? It must be millions, wouldn't you say? I think I'd be frightened to live with one of those pictures'.

A few days later Uma took the picture down and sent it to the Cutchery, to be hung in the Collector's office.²⁶²

Uma's widowhood and her consequent journey to Europe and The United States where she gets embroiled in the national politics of the time, stand as a contrast to the life of quiet domesticity that Dolly chooses. Ghosh is quick to show the two sides of the feminist view point and asks the hard question as to which one would be considered as freedom and which one as lack. However, it is at this very point that Ghosh fails to comprehend as well as deconstruct the female subject as he works towards showing a maturing of this relationship. A friendship that begins through a mutual understanding of each other's intellect and politics, Ghosh ironically shows that Dolly somehow pities the life that Uma has chosen for herself in her refusal to answer to Uma and let her know about her pregnancy: 'When she picked up a pen to write to Uma, she could think of nothing to say...Nor did she want to write to Uma about this subject [her pregnancy]: it would be as though she were flaunting her domesticity in her friend's face; underscoring her childlessness' (189-90). It is only after losing her child to a miscarriage can Dolly finally see herself as able to share the experiences of Uma. Uma's

²⁶² Amitav Ghosh. *The Glass Palace*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000 p.114. Print.

journey across the Atlantic and the freedom that she feels is seen somehow as secondary to being Dolly's familial contentment. Her anger at Rajkumar for being unfaithful to Dolly is shown to be a righteous one, one that lacks a basic understanding of the two people she considers her closest friends. What starts off as a revolutionary friendship fizzles out in the narrative as an aside, marred by petty assumptions based on egos and socially acceptable viewpoints. Ghosh's handling of this relationship leaves much to be desired, as this is a relationship which stood as an antithesis to the philosophies of class, caste, power structures that formed the ethos of the colonial Empire and could have been developed into a form of human enterprise that would be recognised as the *antistory* to the constricted contours of colonizer-colonized relationship.

Contrasting Uma and Dolly, the relationship between Catherine Burnham and Paulette is one which is already shaped through the official ward-warden relationship. Paulette, the orphan of famed biologist is taken in as a ward in the house of the well-known businessman Mr Burnham as a part of the colonial enterprise at his mansion on the riverside, Bethel. Mrs Burnham is a kind but strict benefactress who always ensured that Paulette was dressed in the most modest ways and followed the Christian principles of austerity. However, she is also aware of the struggle that Paulette faces being part of this new household and her quick repartee often lightens a situation which has the potential to escalate to dangerous levels. This is brought out in the first description of their relationship where Paulette, who is French, struggles with mastering the English language:

Paulette had laboured hard to behave and speak exactly, as she should, but not always with success. Just the other day, in referring to the crew of a boat, she had proudly used a newly-learnt English word: 'cock-swain'. But instead of earning accolades, the word had provoked a disapproving frown. When they were out of Annabel's hearing, Mrs Burnham explained that the word Paulette has used smacked a little too much of the 'increase and multiply' and could not be used in company...But then, unaccountably, the BeeBee had burst into giggles and slapped Paulette's knuckles with her fan. 'As for the other thing, dear', she said, 'no mem would ever let it past her lips'.²⁶³

Moving away from the Orientalist idea of the relationship between the subject and its master, the relation between Paulette and Mrs Burnham is shaped by a fierce sense of protectiveness

²⁶³ Amitav Ghosh. *Sea of Poppies*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2008 p128. Print.

that Mrs Burnham feels about Paulette, a feeling that often gives rise to jealousy as well. While in the second part of the Trilogy this relationship vanishes into the background after Paulette runs off from Bethel after the sexual abuse by Mr Burnham, it is a relationship that is somewhat rekindled in the final instalment. It is only in *Flood of Fire* that the readers realise that Cathy Burnham is not much older to Paulette and her own miserable life has often affected the way she had hoped to model Paulette into. It is only in exploring her personal history is the reader forced to go back to *Sea of Poppies* and the relationship between the two is then read in a new light of living through proxy that Cathy wishes to do through her tutoring and mentoring of Paulette. Her apology to Paulette for interfering in her budding romance with Zachary ushers in a new direction that this unequal friendship can now move into. However, this expectation is cut short with Cathy's sudden suicide. At the end of the trilogy, the reader is left with two women characters who contained a promise of deviation but sadly remained straightjacketed into roles which hardly do them justice. Instead they both are relegated to being figures of lack, voices that amount to nothing, in the overbearingly masculine narrative. Paulette is reduced to being almost a Dorothy to Chinnery's Wordsworth-like narratives of Canton. She is often reduced to being the personification of displacement within the three novels: the displaced motif of sexual release for Mr Burnham, the displaced idealisation of love for Zachary, displaced notion of anger for Mrs Burnham, the surrogate daughter to Fitcher Penrose, a sister figure for Robin Chinnery and Jodu. She is always presented in terms of the relations that surround her, quite akin to the painting of Adelle whose silence becomes all the more pronounced in the din of the ventriloquized voices of her lover, her owner and her painter. Similarly, Cathy Burnham, instead of seizing the arc of her character which ushers in a new powerful womanhood which is unapologetic of its choices of self-gratification, is turned around and remoulded into the figure of a love-worn beloved who sacrifices herself for the sake of an affair that lasted hardly a month and yet has more effect on her than decisions she had taken since then as a woman who makes her way into the skewed highly masculine Empire. Both these characters create a sense of bathos in the readers as they are left realising that the trilogy reaffirms the age-old structures of patriarchal beliefs where the woman in a narrative about war and consumerism has to play the part of either the lover or the scorned wife and if she tries to transgress that she will be considered eliminated from the narrative through suicide or a silencing of her voice by

merging her into the background: it is fitting when Cathy in her last letter before her suicide signs off as , ‘the woman whose unfortunate destiny it was to be’²⁶⁴.

CC is one of the few novels of Ghosh which has women as the facilitator of action in spite of the protagonists being male. Urmila, who becomes the chosen one for the alternate counter science to be invested with the knowledge of the Calcutta Chromosome, starts off as a peripheral character but slowly gains ground as the narrative progresses. Her friendship with Sonali forms the pivotal point which unravels the knots that remain as blocks in the information chain that Murugan has been able to accumulate. Sonali’s mother’s close proximity with Phulboni makes her privy to the story of Laakhan, one that helps in creating a causal link among the disparate links that form the narrative. While the friendship between the two women is not explored as minutely as in the other novels, they are projected as the catalysts, the messiah figures who will be responsible for the final transference of knowledge to the ultimate vector—Antar. Urmila and Sonali form an almost supernatural bond which transcends not only their immediate differences in social positions and age, but also time and space as they move seamlessly between the distant future as Tara and Maria and the narrative present as Urmila and Sonali. They serve as foils to each other, one mousy and the other free-spirited, yet they both remain chained to the roles that have been assigned to them. While Sonali remains in the shadows, a reservoir of knowledge and access to Murugan and the readers for whenever they need, Urmila’s trajectory becomes more problematic. Introduced to the readers as a prototype of the middle class working woman , constantly fighting against the doctrination of subordination that has become part of her conflicted self, Urmila’s easy acceptance of her role as the goddess like figure who Murugan urges, ‘If you have it in your power to change the script write me in. Don’t leave me behind’²⁶⁵ seems a bit contrived as well as out of character. Moreover, by elevating her to the notion of the goddess figure, one with the power to usher change, she is instantly alienated and elevated into the very role that she had been fighting against—the deification of the woman to keep her within the normative codes of conduct. Therefore while the deviant Mangala is metamorphosed into the old Mrs Aratounian, Urmila needs to take up the role of the persona which will be the normative face of this alternate historiography.

²⁶⁴ Amitav Ghosh. *Flood of Fire*. Haryana: Penguin Books India, 2015 p595. Print.

²⁶⁵ Amitav Ghosh. *The Calcutta Chromosome: a novel of fevers, delirium & discovery*. New Delhi: Penguin India (1996,2008), p 260. Print.

As evinced by the exploration of female bonding in Ghosh's novels one point which becomes obvious is the relegating of the female subjectivity in the shadows for the supposed bigger concerns of the narrative. There have been ample writings on the subjugated position of Ila and Thamma in *SL* and how that reflects that for the woman, cosmopolitanism or multiculturalism is often a reiteration of the same patriarchal rules that she had been trying to transgress. Therefore this chapter chooses to concentrate on characters which have not been explored much. However, this devaluation of the female subjectivity runs as a common theme in almost all of Ghosh's novels in spite of the bigger roles that his female characters are being invested with. Even though as Rajeswari Sunder Rajan states, 'Ghosh reverses the usual gender attribution of the qualities "active-passive"'²⁶⁶, the women being always mobile, both physically and metaphysically, yet, Ghosh and his narrators see this motility in terms of a passive movement without any actual insight or transgression. Therefore a Nirmal with his revolutionary dreams is much more a revered character for his protagonist Kanai than Nilima whose work is seen as nothing more than self-indulgence. All the four women characters in *HT*—Piya, Nilima, Moyna and Kusum—while fighting the totalizing historical narratives that would choose to forget them, are surprisingly under-utilised in terms of the rich tapestry of contrasting ideals that they represent. Nilima's final reproach to Kanai about the devaluation of her work seems to echo the problem that Ghosh faces with imbuing his female characters with importance within the scope of the alternate historiography that his novels aim at creating: 'Kanai, the dreamers [substitute with the male characters in each of the novels] have everyone to speak for them...But those who're patient, those who try to be strong, who try to build things—no one ever sees any poetry in that, do they?'²⁶⁷

The figure in the rear-view mirror: Representing the Subaltern

'The subaltern is the *object* of discourse, never the subject. Whatever is represented as "subaltern" has always-already been made over: not only translated, but traduced; not only appropriated, but expropriated.'²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Rajeswari Sunder Rajan. 'The Division of Experience in *The Shadow Lines*'. Mentioned in Ania Spyra. 'Is Cosmopolitanism not for Women? Migration in Qurratulain Hyder's *Sita Betrayed* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2006 p15. PDF.

²⁶⁷ Amitav Ghosh. *The Hungry Tide*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004 p.387. Print.

²⁶⁸ Neil Lazarus. "'A figure glimpsed in a rear-view mirror': the question of representation in 'postcolonial' fiction", *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011 p144. Print.

‘How can the Coolie be constituted in another language—especially one that shares a different socio-economic and discursive siting, without depriving him of voice and agency?’²⁶⁹

These two quotes articulate what has been a long standing problem in postcolonial fiction and one which assumes centrality in almost all of Ghosh’s novels. Can the subaltern speak is a question that Ghosh aims to answer through his retelling of deviant histories where the subaltern often plays the role of the propagator of action and is no longer the eyes shining brightly in the bush but figures channelling courses of pasts. From his first novel COR to the latest Ibis Trilogy, the subalterns have been the protagonists or the subject matter of Ghosh’s explorations and are often seen as the reservoirs of knowledge structures which are unfathomable by the colonial self. Figures such as Allow, Fokir, Mangala, Laakhan, Kusum, Horen, Serang Ali, Kishan Singh, Kesri Singh and others form a motley group that challenge the preconceived orientalist notions of the figure of the subaltern as the figure of lack—at least that is what Ghosh aims at in his narratives. The question that arises out of it is whether Ghosh is successful in breaking the barrier between the subaltern subject and the historian-narrator in presenting the subaltern as the subject of the discourse and not a passive object. To answer this question it therefore becomes imperative to explore in depth the representation of the subaltern subjects; while it is impossible to analyse every subaltern character that Ghosh peoples his narratives with, we will be concentrating on the characters of Fokir, Allow, Serang Ali and to understand the female subaltern we will take the cases of Kusum and Mangala.

Fokir in HT is the quintessential subaltern figure, one who sees himself as fused with the environment that he guards and rears. A man of few words, he is happiest when he is in his boat in the midst of the mangrove forests. His first appearance in the novel bears testament to this as Ghosh writes,

His frame was not wasted but very lean and his long stringy limbs were almost fleshless in their muscularity... His face was narrow and angular and its gauntness seemed to emphasize the size of his eyes. The cloth tied around his middle was no more than a faded rag and it gave his skeletal frame a look of utter destitution. Yet

²⁶⁹ Tabish Khair. ‘The Example of Amitav Ghosh: (Re) Establishing Connections’. *Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels*. New Delhi: Oxford India Press, 2001, p303. Print.

there was a defiance in his stance at odds with the seeming defencelessness of his unclothed chest and his protruding bones.²⁷⁰

The defiance that Fokir represents is one which will refuse to be interpreted in terms of the intellectual other, represented by a figure like Kanai or even Nirmal and Nilima. His discomfiture at being at home at Lusibari is one that reiterates the refusal of the subaltern subject to become an object of intrigue which can be museumized in the ghettos created for their continuity in the world of the educated gentleman. Fokir's marriage with Moyna stands as an extension of that same project of civilizing the racial, social other through the institutions of marriage, family and work. It is only Piya who comprehends that Fokir's silence is a break from the onslaught of words that scramble over each other to define him. She enjoys their wordless interactions, is almost thankful for them as it gives her a glimpse of a world that language closes off and does not allow entry to—the limitless ahistorical. However, in spite of creating Fokir as a foil to the language-heavy world of Nirmal and Kanai, it seems almost anticlimactic that throughout the narrative, Fokir and his ilk are repeatedly interpreted through the eyes of the intellectual other. At no point do the readers meet Fokir, all they are introduced to is an object interpreted and reinterpreted according to the subject positions of characters like Piya, Kanai, Nirmal or the forest guards. Even his song, which symbolises the synthesis of his self with the natural world, carrying in its folds the myriad histories of pasts which have been buried by time and politics of remembering, is only made available through the lens of the upper middle class, English educated Kanai, already expropriated, its layers of meanings and symbols lost in translation.

Unlike Fokir, both Allow in *River of Smoke* and Serang Ali in *Sea of Poppies* are given access to languages which lay as starkly different from the colonial language however, their representation also remains skewed and often are already presented as made-over images rather than actual figures of histories. Allow makes his first appearance in the narrative as a young boy who acts as a go-between Bahram and Chi- Mei for their conjugal encounters. It is much later in the novel that he reappears in Bahram's study, now playing the part of a dealer of smuggled opium—in a bid to remind Bahram of his past performances and through that secure a deal for himself. He is described as 'a small man, he was dressed unostentatiously, but not inexpensively, in a quilted jacket and a gown of plain, dove-coloured silk. His waist-length hair was dressed with a red ribbon and his head was crowned with a round black

²⁷⁰ Amitav Ghosh. *The Hungry Tide*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004 p.46. Print.

hat'²⁷¹. While Allow's attire places him within the upper echelons of the social order of Canton, yet it also marks him out as one who is desperately trying to fit into it through odd jobs and resorting to criminal ways. Allow occupies a minimal space in the narrative design, and even in that minute area he is shown as cunning yet with a simplicity that is almost infantile, reminding the readers ominously of the descriptions of the slaves in slave narratives where the black man was both monstrous and cunning enough to be kept at a distance, and innocent enough not to be allowed freedom lest the world takes advantage of him. Keeping with the tradition of the supernatural that invades into the language of the alternate pasts, Allow's ghost remains heavy on Bahram's conscience much like an albatross around his neck, reminding him of his own failure to save the almost fetishized figure of the native. Allow's death is almost a ritualised exercise in crucifying the subaltern at the altar of the mistakes made by the enfranchised like Bahram—he is first made to grovel for the opium which his body has now grown addicted to and then is strangled as a memento to commemorate the victimization of the subaltern figure by the insurmountable greed of all those who are supposed to protect him and help him assimilate into the new social order. The final knell is that even in death he is not allowed the pidgin name he had moulded for himself, instead he is Ho Lao-kin, a name which pushes him further into the dregs of oblivion, doomed to forgetting.

While Serang Ali does not suffer as pathetic a predicament as Allow or has to embrace death like Fokir to be memorialised, he fills up the role of the deviant pirate figure who is exoticized by the characters as well as the readers. Ali with his group of lascars can be seen as the male counterpart of Mangala and her motley group of subalterns who take on the edified structures of social, historical and cultural archives and refashion them in their own terms. Ali's shadowy past and his preparing Zachary to infiltrate into the ranks of the sahibs testifies to this intent to subvert the normative social order and establish a new one which is represented through the final flight of the Ibis in *Flood of Fire* into the realm of the Immemorial. With his *paan*-stained teeth and his broken pidgin, Ghosh's description of Ali is nothing short from those of colonial narratives describing the uncouth and yet fearsome native leader who possesses power but lacks civility and therefore must be defeated for the sake of civilisation: 'This was a personage of formidable appearance, with a face that would have earned the envy of Genghis Khan, being thin, long and narrow, with darting black eyes

²⁷¹ Amitav Ghosh. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2011 p260. Print.

that sat restlessly upon rakishly-angled cheekbones. Two feathery strands of moustache drooped down to his chin, framing a mouth that was constantly in motion, its edges stained a bright, livid red: it was as if he were forever smacking his lips after drinking from the opened veins of a mare, like some bloodthirsty Tartar of the steppes'²⁷².

While the male subalterns in Ghosh's narratives suffer from the constricted nature of their representation as stereotypical and often perfunctory sketches of the 'other', the female subalterns are provided with more agency and difference in representation. There are always exceptions like a Moyna who is caught up in the elitist narrative of the subaltern trying to come out from the vicious cycle of their own uselessness which is represented by her husband, the two characters Mangala and Kusum, appearing in novels which are dominated by the elite other, come out as refreshing take on the figure of the subaltern. Mangala is crafty and a mistress of her own world who is completely unconscious of the gaze of the colonial master figure. In his description of Mangala at the laboratory, Farley is quick to notice that she is undaunted by his presence and while a Laakhan is more accommodating towards his discourse of being the master figure, Mangala refuses to play out the master-servant dialectic. She is instead contemptuous of his lack of knowledge and almost as a point of pity allows him a glimpse of the larger universe which she has been able to command. The last description of Mangala that Farley manages to pen down before he, the worded class is violently sent off to his inconsequential death is one of deviant power that threatens to topple the existing structures of knowledge, one that is crude, cadaverous, fearsome and awe-inspiring: 'she was standing in front of all the others, staring at him, smiling to herself. Clutched in her hand, in full view, was the body of the decapitated bird, the blood still oozing from its macabre wound'²⁷³.

Kusum, though not invested with such supernatural powers of aberrance, still is sketched as a character which stands as the last stand of defiance against an official History and its archive that refuses to even admit the existence of the likes of her. Even though Kusum dies much before the narrative of HT begins, her spectral presence is like the 'trace', a sensuous memory which provide psychic manifestations of all those which have been doomed to silence, to disappearance. Kanai's teenage obsession with her, Nirmal's locating of the Poet's idea of transformation in her and Horen's unrequited love for her, all represent the

²⁷² Amitav Ghosh. *Sea of Poppies*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2008 p14. Print.

²⁷³ Amitav Ghosh. *The Calcutta Chromosome: a novel of fevers, delirium & discovery*. New Delhi: Penguin India (1996,2008), p 133. Print.

multiple roles that she plays simultaneously, each part of her bouncing and reflecting on to the other parts. While recounting the protests at Morichjhāpi, Nirmal writes, ‘Where else could you belong, except in the place you refused to leave’²⁷⁴—a description which can be equally attributed to explore the enigmatic figure that Kusum becomes in the narrative. Kusum represents the need for unearthing the silenced sides of History, ones which have fallen through the cracks of memory, a need to capture the moments of the worst atrocities such that the future can pay the debt that it owes to all those who perished in the name of that glorified future—remembering the dispossessed, the displaced and the muzzled:

Do they know what is being done in their names?...As I thought of these things it seemed to me that this whole world has become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have’²⁷⁵

The changing languages in representing the ‘trace’—Burying it or Resurrecting it?

Ghosh evolves his use of languages in recreating the worlds that he imagines, worlds which are buried under the heavy guards of the archive. As one examines the eight novels of Ghosh chronologically, one can perceive a definite shift from the monolithic language structures seen in the initial novels to more polyphonous and heteroglossic dialects, pidgins and different linguistic forms which express the myriad points of articulation that lay in the narratives. Ghosh in novels such as HT, CC and GP document through the eyes and the words of the elite narrator figure who co-opts all points of view and disparate voices and channelizes them through his own rendering. So, the resultant narrative is more often than not monolithic, constricted, and to some extent exploitative. However, in the Ibis Trilogy, Ghosh opens up the monopoly of standard upper middle class British English to the varied currents of languages which are divergent, often with no written scripts and constantly evolving, thus creating an ambience of dynamic exchange. The lascari dialect, the pidgin that is prevalent in Canton, the Anglo-Hindoosthani that Mrs Burnham uses, all supersede their initial tasks of expressing personal opinions and become gateways to comprehend the power politics that remain inherent in choosing word, salutations and expressions. While the monolithic linguistic structures of the earlier novels almost bury the pasts that they had aimed as

²⁷⁴ Amitav Ghosh. *The Hungry Tide*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers, 2004 p.254. Print.

²⁷⁵ Ibid. p262.

reinstating within the archives, these myriad snippets of broken languages almost succeed in achieving the task of resurrecting the ancient pasts. They deconstruct the politics of language that make the choice of memories worthy to be inscribed into the Historical archive and through it disintegrates the idea of the static archive. In return they advocate for the formation of a new dynamic archiving process which refuses all forms of stasis and remains caught up in a moment of flux, forever open to the claims of an Immemorial which refuses to be straightjacketed into definitions. This dance of languages is best expressed through Neel's Chrestomathy which he starts writing as a tribute to the numerous languages that form the ethos of the world of Canton. Ghosh's final words about the nature of this dictionary become an apt tribute to this fluidity of languages:

The Chrestomathy is a work that cannot, in principle, ever be considered finished. One reason for this is that new and previously unknown word-chits in Neel's hand have continued to turn up in places where he once resided – these unearthings have been regular enough, and frequent enough, to confound the idea of ever bringing the work to completion. But the Chrestomathy is also, in its very nature, a continuing dialogue²⁷⁶

Conclusion

. . . there are so many sorts of events which are just constantly, as it were, wrapped in silence. This whole mass march out of Burma is wrapped in silence. So yes, it does interest me very much, especially as a writer, you know you're in the business of producing words and there's a kind of paradox when you're addressing something which is explicitly silent²⁷⁷

Ghosh in his novels explicitly deal with the problem of silence and the need for language to articulate that silence. He engages in this project through characters, situations, languages and relationships, the everyday lived reality of pasts that are not documented in the fact-specific galleries of historical documentation. Through such a project Ghosh aims at erecting alternate structures of meanings which would not only unearth the forgotten and bring it into the realm of the remembered but also deconstruct the edified monolithic structure of official History.

²⁷⁶ Amitav Ghosh. 'The *Ibis* Chrestomathy'. Accessed on 2016. <<http://www.amitavghosh.com/chrestomathy.html>>. Web.

²⁷⁷ Amitav Ghosh. Interview by Chitra Sankaran. 'Diasporic Predicaments: An Interview with Amitav Ghosh'. *History, Narrative and Testimony in Amitav Ghosh's Fiction*. Ed. Chitra Sankaran. Albany: SUNY, 2012 p12. PDF.

However, as evinced through the discussions in this chapter, one finds that Ghosh as a narrator and author often falls into those very trappings of stereotypes, power politics and representational politics which define the skewed representation in History. Even though that does not diminish the importance of the work that Ghosh as an author has embarked on, it does limit its scope as it ends up creating structures that are selective, ones which create similar gatekeepers of allowance and acceptance which had made official History as problematic and unapproachable—losing out on the *antistory* that it had worked hard to illuminate and bring from the other side of silence.

Conclusion

This thesis had aimed to examine the fictional works of Amitav Ghosh through theoretical tenets of history, memory and the concept of the immemorial. History in this thesis has not been considered only as an archiving project, but rather an active political statement that is often a reflection of the power structures that it is made to serve. Secondly, two other criteria have also been utilised to explore the efficacy of the narratives, albeit through the fictional form of the novel in representing pasts which have been obliterated from popular memory, from the archives and relegated to the realm of the forgotten: the idea of how place plays an important role in imbuing individuals as well as spaces with the politics of representation and memorialisation; and the use of language which remains as the gatekeeper to the memorialisation project. As evinced through the different chapters, each of which explored two or more novels simultaneously, the memorialisation project of bringing alternate histories to the arena of the remembered is a plan which is fraught with many problems. Each of the chapters presented a different angle of this conundrum.

In chapter one, the main aim was to lay down the different versions and visions of historical studies which have been implemented in the subcontinent in order to create a historical archive which reflects the movement of the nation in causal links from a supposed dark past towards the light of the future. The chapter examined the problems with each of those methods and through a keen critical discussion, arrived at a new concept of the ‘antistory’ which derives its characteristic from Walter Benjamin’s idea of the immemorial, one that cannot be realised through the older methods of archiving, but can only be experienced at the moment of crisis of its own annihilation. It was therefore stated that the writer who has been imbued with the messianic power to express the immemorial in its time of crisis has a greater role in establishing the alternate histories which have been buried by official narratives. This is not only to position them anew in the politics of the state, but also to work towards the justice which has been denied to them—a justice which is owed to them by the future.

Chapter two took up the first two novels of Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines* and through the theories of minor literature as well as migrant narratives, showed how both these texts can be read as an exercise in mythicizing the personal and bringing it within

the purview of the public through stories which straddle the two distinct worlds of the private and the public. The chapter divided the analysis into subparts which talked of notions of belonging, the violence of homecoming, the migrant experience and how Ghosh through his narrators examine the pitfalls of alternate notions of freedom and governance.

Chapter three takes into consideration the three novels *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide* and analyses them through the lens of counter histories and the problems associated with exploring the tenets of antistory. Even though completely disparate in terms of their subject matter as well as the time periods that the three novels are set in, the chapter explores the threads of commonality that each of them share, those of memory, personal remembrances and the need to linguistically express ancient pasts. The chapter also comments on how memory also works through biases and selections and therefore the author-narrator needs to be weary of the overexposure of memories that he is being subjected to, to overcome the problem of a memory overdrive, one which might end up causing the same harm to the genuine memories which their earlier burial had led to.

Chapter four presented a mammoth analysis of Ghosh's most ambitious project, the *Ibis Trilogy*. Following the different personal stories that converge onto the public plane of the Opium trade, the chapter critically scrutinizes the use of actual historical data and documents that Ghosh has explored and utilised in building his fictional universe. The chapter also delved into the alternate means of exchange that the narratives indulge in, like the subplots of the search for the elusive golden camellia, or the artists of Canton or for that matter the bastardization of languages to create new registers for Canton and its traders, and shows how each of them can be seen as modes of globalised exchanges which lay beyond the exploitative means of commercial exchange which has made one set of structures more powerful at the cost of the destruction of two nations simultaneously. The chapter also analyses the first stirrings of the nationalist movement as seen in the British army and its soldiers, the realisation of the futility of fighting wars which are not one's own and the need to deconstruct the notions of honour, bravery and belonging which constricts the individual's growth.

Chapter five amalgamated the different problem areas which remained inherent in Ghosh's project of unearthing alternate histories. Read under the broad topics of the illegitimate child, the women characters, the figures of the subaltern and finally the evolution of language in his eight novels, this chapter worked towards establishing how Ghosh's memorialisation project

was falling into the same traps of exclusivity and selective remembrance which ironically has been the point of distrust and deconstruction which has led to this alternate memorialisation project. The chapter surmises about the problems of representation that always marks the postcolonial narrative, where the subaltern is always already the object of discourse and has been unsuccessful in becoming the subject of his own discourse. While Ghosh's intentions to make the voiceless audible and give him a language to articulate his self is noteworthy and deserves credit, yet it still does not absolve him of the responsibility of representing the other with the sensitivity and understanding that has been denied to it both in the past as well in the present. It is only through this that the past can be given its rightful place in memory and provided the justice which it has been deprived of.

A Way Forward: the social and ethical burden of being the author-historian

On 8 July 2016, Burhan Wani, an alleged Kashmiri militant leader, a follower of the radical separatist group Hizbul Mujahideen, was killed in an encounter by the state armed forces. As mainstream media hailed him as the 'poster-boy'²⁷⁸ of new age terrorism who recruited young Kashmiris fed up with the brutality of the Indian state through his social media channels—a 'terrorist' who never hid his identity and came from a family with high educational background and his death a special win for the armed forces, the days following his death, multitudes of Kashmiris came out on the streets to mourn his killing. Wani's death, though seemingly inconsequential at first had ended up in heightened tensions in Kashmir with the armed forces and the locals clashing at multiple areas, repeated reports of police and army atrocities where children and women as well as thousands of innocents have been injured grievously by pellet guns streamed through social media. Interestingly, there has been a methodical silence or a complete disregard for the unrest in mainstream media as well as government publications. Reeling under the terrifying side-effects of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) for more than two decades, Kashmir has bred many narratives of rapes, beatings, deaths, yet if one checks the official records there is complete sanitisation of these facts. The Amnesty International Report, titled 'Denied' charts out the different ways in which human rights violations have been continuing in the Valley and how it has survived with impunity due to the lack of accountability that comes under the Special Powers for the soldiers. '5 July 2015 will mark 25 years since the AFSPA in effect came into force in Jammu and Kashmir. Till now, not a single member of the security forces deployed in the

²⁷⁸ Peerzada Ashiq. 'Burhan Wani, Hizbul poster boy, killed in encounter' *The Hindu* 9 July 2016. Web. 14 July 2016.

state has been tried for human rights violations in a civilian court. This lack of accountability has in turn facilitated other serious abuses,' said Minar Pimple, Senior Director of Global Operations at Amnesty International²⁷⁹. However, if one looks at the official narratives that dominate mainstream thought, there is a curious denial about Kashmir and the plight of its civilians or worse, it is buried under a potent narrative of jingoistic nationalistic fervour where all such killings are deemed as necessary to either teach them a lesson for a past which they should be forcibly made accountable for (the flight of the Kashmiri Pandits)²⁸⁰ or a necessary collateral for maintaining the territorial integrity of the country. The amnesia as well as blindness that dominates the public memory rendering the atrocities to the zone of the radically forgotten, where even the act of their forgetting has been or is in the process of being erased, it becomes important for alternate media like personal diaries, facebook messages, and other avenues of social media to keep the conversation relevant as well as engage with the political aspect of it that often gets overshadowed in the battle of choosing the side that one has to be on in order to have a view about the crisis. As the death toll and the number of injured innocents pile up in the once 'paradise on earth', the need for other voices, ones recording and remembering the events as they continually face the threat of being rendered oblivious, become more urgent and potent. It is these narratives which will construct the *antistory*, strong enough to challenge and deconstruct the measured silences of the official narrative as well as restore them for future generations who as Nirmal envisages in *The Hungry Tide*, will be 'richer in ideals, less cynical, less selfish than mine'²⁸¹.

I mention Kashmir and its gory narrative as a part of the conclusion of this thesis as it remains till date one of the most tragic conditions of state control in the post-independence India where the lure of the land becomes more important and dominant than the lives it shelters. In the face of such cultural amnesia, the task of the writer becomes pertinent in giving a voice to the silences, to the misinterpreted histories of people who remain prisoners between an apathetic state and a rising militant threat. Ghosh in the novels which have been discussed in this work, continually create narrators or accumulators who sieve through the dense fog of officialdom and the concrete walls of the Archive to explore stories of human rights, multiple truths and documents which are disparate with the official homogenous

²⁷⁹ 'India: Accountability still missing for human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir' *Amnesty International* 1 July 2015. Web <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/07/india-accountability-still-missing-for-human-rights-violations-in-jammu-and-kashmir/>. 13 July 2016.

²⁸⁰ A good overview of the persecution of the Kashmiri Pandits can be read in 'Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits: What happened on January 19, 26 years ago?' by Shreya Biswas. *India Today* 19 January 2016. Web. 13 July 2016.

²⁸¹ Amitav Ghosh. *The Hungry Tide*. Noida: Harper Collins Publishers 2004 p278. Print.

version where the pasts all converge together in a seamless bind in order to move towards a glorified future. Ghosh's narrators are not without faults; they often colour the experience of the pasts with their own personal philosophical, political and social standpoints. But they still remain more relevant than the official historical edifice as they deconstruct the gaps in the public memory, breaking down the years of consciously constructed remembrances and open them to the whirling forces of pasts which have been denied justice. Justice is a word that stands heavy when discussing the ramifications of opening what can be cheekily termed as the Pandora's box of ancient pasts. The question of does remembering actually serve a purpose or is it an exercise in masochism, reopening wounds whose presence the mind never registered has dominated the discourse of untold histories, let it be mass tragedies like the Holocaust or the Partition or regionalised ones like that of Morichjhāpi or the long March from Burma or even something as seemingly non-violent as the slow destruction of a province like China under the garb of freedom and equality. It is a question which has to be answered in multiple points. It is first required to break the question into the different subparts which it contains: firstly, what is being remembered and what implications it has for the present where it is being remembered?; secondly, what need has arisen in the present for that past to be specifically brought out in the public arena?; thirdly, what claim does that past have over the future towards which the present is looking forward to? To answer the first, it is important to first go back to Tzvetan Todorov as he tries to understand the background of the human rights crimes which were conducted in Cambodia. He writes,

The great crimes of the Khmer Rouge were not the work of sadists or the mentally ill but the result of reactions familiar to everyone. One of them stems from the feeling that you and your loved ones are in mortal danger... Another one comes from the desire to improve the current state of affairs for yourself and your community... The end seemed to justify the means. To these reasons can be added the understandable fear of being destroyed by the very machine one is serving²⁸²

Remembering therefore springs from a need to understand the different motives that guide human actions and understand how and whether these motives remain dormant in our overall actions of conducting the state, politics, history and memory in the present. Secondly, remembering the ones which have been silenced, forgotten or have slipped through the cracks of popular memory also serves the ethical purpose of building an awareness of how the past

²⁸² Tzvetan Todorov. *Memory as a Remedy for Evil*. Trans. Gila Walker. London: Seagull Books 2010 pp 27-8. Print.

colours the mainstream discourse of the present, its implications on the simplest of present incidents as well as its effect on the shaping of the identity markers that remain contradictory within ourselves.

The second part of the question, the contemporary trigger that has led to the unearthing of the buried pasts is an interesting conundrum. As Benjamin would state, every generation has been granted a messianic power on which the past yet unarticulated has a claim. Therefore, in the moment of crisis, as the past flashes by, on its path of doom, it is the task of the messianic historian to capture it in its urgency and document it for posterity. Therefore, it is not a crisis in the present that pushes towards the unravelling of the past, but a crisis in forgetting, where to remember is not only vital but cathartic for the present to fulfil its powers of standing guard for all those who the archive has engulfed into a darkness of illegibility. The possibilities of the past which have been unfulfilled and have not been actualised claim their position on the present through deliberation and intentions, demanding their deliverance from those who address them—the present whose own redemption lay in that past.

The third part and the most important part of the question, what does the past claim of the future, is once again best answered through the insightful analysis of Todorov who sees this act of remembering as a redemptive one with far-reaching humanist concerns. Todorov concludes his analysis of how remembering can be read as a remedy to evil with the following lines which reflect the pertinent role that pasts play in unravelling the future:

The memory of the past will serve no purpose if it is used to build an impassable wall between evil and us, identifying exclusively with irreproachable heroes and innocent victims and driving the agents of evil outside the confines of humankind... Therefore the remedy we are seeking will not consist in merely remembering the evil to which our group or our ancestors were victims. We have to go a step farther and ask ourselves about the reasons that gave rise to the evil... Our adversary here is not morality but egocentricity and Manichaeism. Simply put, it is not individuals or groups of individuals who are bad but their deeds. The memory of the past could help us in this enterprise of taming evil, on the condition that we keep in mind that good and evil flow from the same source and that in the world's best narratives they are not neatly divided.²⁸³

²⁸³ Ibid. pp79-83.

Ghosh as a writer understands the implications of all the three parts of the question of remembering and his narrators in the novels often work towards this goal of baring pasts to the scrutiny of the future, baring the present to the scrutiny of the past and finally baring the possibilities of the future to the claims of the past. However, as evinced in the analysis throughout this thesis, this is fraught with problems which are often irreconcilable. Ghosh's narrators are without fail middle/upper class, upper caste males who bring into the narrative their own prejudices and privileges which such social position entails them. This is endemic in all the eight novels: the unnamed narrator in SL who is often condescending of all experiences related to the women characters and has a tendency to paint them as ones who are not as aware as him or his idol Tridib, or Kanai and Nirmal in HT who are pitted as the true rebels who work towards the bigger revolution than Piya or Nilima, the male narrator-author in GP who often eclipses the 'other' experience, and so on. This therefore colours the universe of the novels with the same brush that ironically it had sought to upturn and question. Ghosh's narratives are also sanitised of voices of other genders—there is a marked absence of homosexual, transgender, bisexual characters in the eight novels and even if in some cases they are there, like Robin Chinnery, they are almost asexual, tokenistic representations who are quickly relegated to the periphery. His narrators are also as selective and hierarchical as the Historical Archive as they choose and favour narratives that fit into the mould of the *antistory* that they had built. The voices of the *antistory* are selectively polyphonic, creating not a din but a well-orchestrated heterogeneous multitude, where each figure has a specific role to play and stick to the given script. One who tries to transgress is often undercut, like an Ila who has to be a neurotic figure by the end of the narrative to be worthy of the readers' as well as the narrator's attention, or a Fokir who is killed off and boxed within the GPS system that makes him dispensable in the new system or a Cathy Burnham who uncharacteristically commits suicide after emerging as one of the strongest women figures in the fictional universe of Ghosh, or Shireen Modi whose transgression interestingly brings her back to the same social milieu that she had wished to be rid of.

The figure of the cosmopolitan, multicultural protagonist narrator often constrict themselves to being the colonial 'Babu', much removed from the lived reality of the worlds that they aim at uncovering. Secondly, the language that is used by them often faces the problem of being alienated in terms of dialogue as well as mapping. While Ghosh consciously tries to play with languages in his later novels like the Trilogy, there is a conspicuous absence of language variations in his earlier ones. The notational differences that differentiate the classes as well

as the castes in the subcontinent are absent in novels like CC, COR. Figures like Fokir or Moyna speak in tongues which have been either violently anglicised (as in the case of Moyna) or absolutely silenced (like in Fokir or Horen whose dialogues in the text are stripped to the bare minimum). In the Trilogy, while the proliferation of the Chinese pidgin is a welcome change from the singularity of language used in the other novels, it is still removed from the lived reality of characters like Kesri or his family.

The second problem that the language of the narration creates in the novels is that of mapping of characters. While place and space are important components in the shaping of the narrative in most of these novels, the influence of that place politics is curiously absent in the language used by the characters. Murugan, Antar, Tara and Urmila in CC all come from different physical spaces and yet their languages are fluently similar to each other. Similarly, while Zachary hails from America in the Trilogy, his language bears no markers of his slave history. Ila or May's usage of English is completely Indianised in spite of the fact that they never have been in India for such a long period of time to develop such an affinity. The examples abound in all the narratives to some degree or the other, making many of the dialogues in the novels generic to the extent that they bear no resemblance to the background that the character is hailing from.

Another stark absence in Ghosh's novels is the complete erasure of the servant class that abound the household in the subcontinent. None of the novels have figures of the house help even in a case like that of *Lankasuka* in GP, who form the silent blue collar workforce which form the backbone of the domestic sphere in the subcontinent. While some may argue that Dolly and Mohan, the horse carriage driver in GP would come under this category, but they are more enfranchised than the servant class in the typical household who would most often not even have a voice, yet are the repositories of all family stories; are the first victims of the caste hierarchies practised in the social structure. While Ghosh reiterates that the only way of not thinking about the nation in terms of the parameters provided by the colonial powers, it is important to understand history through the lens of the family, it seems almost a criminal overlooking of the most integral part of the family structure in the subcontinent—the army of servants who keep the structure well-oiled and running. The Trilogy, especially *Flood of Fire* and *River of Smoke*, does make a mention of them running the Burnham household or Bahram's set-up in Canton, they are merely oblique references which are mostly blink and miss.

Amitav Ghosh is considered to be one of the most important writers in the project of reclaiming the idea of the postcolonial self in Indian English fiction. Moving away from the binaries of experiences which had formed the backbone of the postcolonial narrative, his stories are investigations into silences of the archive as well as a concentrated effort to deconstruct the walls of the archive to allow the influx of experiences hitherto banished or buried by the mainstream. His reading of the colonial structures and exploring colonisation as not only a system of rule but also one which ominously erased the line that marked the difference between the victim and the victimiser, the colonised and the coloniser, the past and the present, makes his narratives a complex experience of fragmenting and reshaping our views of personal and public histories. However, when the writer takes up the task of unearthing the ahistorical societies and experiences and brings them within the purview of the historical, he needs to be extremely cautious of his position as he runs the risk of committing the same mistakes that he is critiquing. Ghosh, while intentionally seems to want to present the untold, yet more often than not performs those same acts of censoring that he through his narrators have accused mainstream official History of. The 'I' of his narrators is not the evolving self which surrenders itself to the whirls of the Immemorial but a strongly historical subject which acts through the same violence with which it has been created. With current politics and public memory committed to the same task of obliterating all those whose voices are dissenting, questioning and disparate with the artifice of the clarion call of a future of greater good, better development and such vague terms of greatness, writers like Ghosh have the urgent task of rethinking their stances and truly give themselves to recording and documenting all those which History is threatening to or has already engulfed. It is now more important than ever for the writer to assert himself against the grain of the homogenous archive and remember to utilise the messianic power which have been granted to him by the past, by the dead, by the wronged to resurrect them for justice, if not from the present then from a future to which they lay their claim.

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