

## Chapter IV

### **Of Past Times and Present Contexts: Reworking Spatio Temporality**

Amitav Ghosh is undoubtedly the most cosmopolitan of contemporary Indian English writers along with being the most significant. This significance has its roots in his cosmopolitanism, for he is a writer who travels and re-maps the world, drawing connections across the boundaries of modern nation states. It is in this creative engagement with historical and political realities and truths, it is in this clear headed erasure and redrawing of the cultural and political lines that divide and unite that Amitav Ghosh finds his mission as a writer. With an anthropologist's sense of detail and a historian's grasp of facts and chronology and with a creative writer's curiosity about causation and effects and great narrative skills and imagination, Ghosh weaves together a pluralistic and self-reflexive view of the world - one that challenges the smugness of accepted narratives and point of views and the certainties of post-colonial borders as well as generic boundaries.

Amitav Ghosh is most of all involved in a quest for narrative significance, in trying to find a place for himself and other human beings in the universe. This quest is expressed in political social terms. This artistic intent is apparent in all his works. He is interested in unraveling existing (meta) narratives and understanding the ways in which the roles are narrated. It is this quest which is covered on a wide canvas in Amitav Ghosh's works. From magic realism, through anthropological notes,

journalistic essays and science/fiction to a truly immense historical novel, Ghosh pursues the problematic attempts of an individual and hence emerges as the major story teller of the world equal to R.K. Narayan. Ghosh is able to sympathize with his characters. This is so because he is involved in the same enterprise like his characters, therefore all his stories are the stories that come out of his life and experiences. These are stories that emanate from and deal with the stuff of humanity human yearning, emotions, all spiritual yearnings that create humanity.

Amitav Ghosh explores historical moments and constructions by both culturally and psychologically travelling through time and space in order to give form and content to his own narrative impulses and gives us a complex picture of interpenetrating lives of individuals, the interaction between their individual narratives. It is in this pattern that emerges in the event, together with various considerations given to the individuals and their desires and compulsions where Amitav Ghosh finds his message. This interest in the individual while trying to map a new way of looking at the world and attempting to write a new history, can be seen in his first novel *The Circle of Reason* (1980). This novel shows his involvement with the idea of border and the crossing of the border marked a break from the traditional themes of the Indian English novel, as it showed an unmaking and remaking of individuals lives fuelled by the legitimate and necessary aspirations which render the borders of nation states porous.

This novel is taken as the starting point of a whole new generation of writers - often called Ghosh generation or the Stephanine School - who had left a lasting imprint on the novel of the eighties thus setting the tenor for a new thrust in Indian

fiction in English. These novelists, who, have published their first novels in the mid-eighties or early nineties have brought a new internationalism to their fiction, a contemporaneity to their outlook with a daring experimentation in forms and structures, while at the same time wiping out the linguistic barriers that inhabited the earlier novelists. This group includes Upamanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, Allan Sealy, Amit Chaudhary and Vikram Seth most of whom belong to the urban milieu.

One finds especially in the work of Ghosh, a world view that all such borders that hem us in and attempt to define us should be challenged - be they political, cultural, linguistic, racial, communal, spatial or even temporal. All these borders are constructed and meant for crossing. A place does not merely exist, it has to be invented in one's imagination. Travel is a spiritual quest, a quest for narrative design, for personal significance in a meaningful world. To read *The Circle Of Reason* closely to see the significance of the very act of writing, to read the patterns being evolved by characters and the novelist, is a useful entry point into the works and world of Amitav Ghosh which explore the limits of spatio-temporality.

Taking clues from Indian philosophy, Amitav Ghosh chooses a circular pattern for his first novel *The Circle of Reason*, which was first to appear after the euphoria that Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* had created. Deriving from three 'gunas' explicated in the *Bhagwad Gita: Satwa, Rajas, Tamas*, Ghosh renames the sections of his book. *Satwa* is described as light of the consciousness, Ghosh renames it as "reason", which is very much a western concept and is associated with many traits like the power to think rationally, a scientific way of discriminating between right and wrong, a state minus superstition, progressive attitude and civilized way of life. The

writer brings together both Indian and Western elements, thus making even the title suggestive. Ironically, as the characters move towards the West, passion and death dominate in its chronotopy.

The second 'guna' '*Rajas: Passion*' has an outward movement. *Rajas* is impurity which leads to activity. In this section, the 'Ras' people indulge in taking, telling, listening, gossiping fighting, falling prey to conspiracies, dancing, worrying about things are included. All the pandemonium created at the end of the section "*Rajas: Passion*", prepares us for the final section of the novel called "*Tamas : Death*". *Tamas* as described as "*Darkness and Inertia*". Besides this, *Tamas* also indicates a tendency to decay and to die. Thus Ghosh moves from one to another both in time and space.

Initially located in a refugee village, the story refers to Bangladesh and Calcutta, finally moving to Middle East via Kerala. This space also gives a time sequence to the narrative. Neither entirely rural nor urban and with no stable idea of attitude, it therefore, becomes an epic of restlessness typical of chronotopy and yet there is a certain calm, that comes from reconciliation and understanding. Science, philosophy, history, politics, culture, art, language, the joy of living, the despair of repeated loss is the core of the novel. It provides not one, but many stories each equally appealing and important.

Instead of dealing with one character, this novel is a story of entire humanity. Being an expatriate in more than the defining sense of the term, Ghosh's 'travels' are strangely in the nature of an exodus rather than just individual dislocation. All the characters belong to the world. The way Ghosh tells stories, makes story telling itself a

way of looking at the world. By letting his stories interplay with time for instance, Ghosh achieves a remarkable original synthesis of two different concepts of time.

The novel begins with the description of Alu - who remains present in all the three sections of the novel. Alu, an eight year old boy had lost his mother and father in a car accident and comes to stay with his aunt Torudebi and uncle Balaram in Lalpukar. He is wedged between them. The uncle is obsessed with phrenology and aunt with sewing machine. Apparently discordant in their natures-one an intellectual rationalist, the other superstitious, they are paradoxically similar in their respective obsessions. He does not know them at all. He has an extra ordinary head: "It was an extra ordinary head-huge several times too large for an eight year old, and curiously uneven, bulging all over knots and bumps."<sup>(3)</sup> People talk about his head differently, but Bolaida believed: "No it is not like rock at all. It is an alu, a potato huge, freshly dug bumpy potato."<sup>(3)</sup>.

From that day he is named Alu throughout his life, though, he had another name finely scriptural - Nachiketa Bose. He is neither ugly nor handsome, neither tall nor short, not even dark or fair. Instead of giving him a formal school education Balaram decided to teach him the art of weaving. As he grows, he becomes perfect in this art. Meanwhile Balaram continued his assessments of Alu's nature and future. Initially felt that:

A witch's brew could be bubbling in that lump of a head - destructiveness perhaps, mixed with Amativeness or secrecy and peppered with Combativeness or Acquisitiveness. And if one could

find no way of identifying and combating those organs it would be just a matter of time before they drove the boy to some hideous crime. (9)

Disturbed by his orphaned nephew's impassivity and lack of emotion, Balaram Bose attempted to reach out to the boy: "Alu," said Balaram shyly, "One must not brood over the past. One ought to think of the future. The future is what is important. The past does not matter. One could do anything with the future. One can change the world." In the same breath he further emphasized: "How can one change the world, if one has no passion?" (28)

Nachiketa exhibits its significance. In the Upanishads, Nachiketa is the name of the boy who obeying his father waits at Yama's door. When Yama grants him the boon, Nachiketa goes for the ultimate knowledge - the secret of life and death. The name's significance becomes apparent in the second part of the novel when Alu is buried and given up for dead in a building called an - Najma the 'star collapse':

A tornado of dust swirled out of the debris while the rubble was still shuddering. ... When it fell it was an avalanche of thousands and thousands of tons of bricks and concrete and cement, and Alu was almost exactly in its centre.(193)

This survival of Alu despite the might of the inanimate cement and bricks, is indicative of the victory of creative mind over ruthless mechanisms. He is at the death's door for days refusing food and water but thinking. His quest is not for knowledge of the secret of the universe-the infinitely large, but about : "Cleanliness and dirt and the infinitely small."(235)

In the words of G J V Prasad (2003) Alu's quest, "is not for the understanding of the life after but for knowledge of the cause of the ills of the society, the life present." (51) The diachronic ailments of our existence. Alu's miraculous escape creates a mystical aura about him and elevates him to a semi - Messiah status. This transformation that he undergoes is almost taken to the realms of fantasy. This is considered to be reminiscent of Saleem Siani of *Midnight Children*, who gets his moment of enlightenment while lying hidden in the washing "chest. Alu's perception becomes broader after that. This elevation to the position of spiritual authority withdraws him into silence and detachment; he reverts to the role of observer. An impressive aura now surrounds him:

... and when Alu came to all that his old mildness vanished. He let the loom be and sat with his hands folded on his lap, absolutely still, but his voice grew in strength and power until it reached beyond the courtyard and into the lanes and gullies outside. (280)

He declares that the enemy of mankind is money:

... which is the battle ground which travels on every man and every woman silently preparing them for their defeat, turning one against the other, helping them to destroy themselves? ... Money. The answer is Money. (281)

To convert humdrum and apparently drab and meaningless daily existence into an aesthetically pleasing artifact, was one of the reasons for so many characters to be inducted in the novel. These characters fill in the gaps in the narrative by relating parts of the story and are symbolic of space Zindi's character is fully developed by the

novelist. She's introduced as young and buxom beauty. Hajj Fahmy, an elderly man in Ras is cared by her.

She treats all strangers warmly and is an interesting talker. Her reaction to the news that Alu may have died in the building collapse is a mysterious one:

The star collapsed today, said Prof. Samuel ... but when it happened, only Alu was inside: He was trapped in the basement, right in the middle of the building ... Zindi struck her forehead with the heel of the palm. Him too! She cried, and her voice rasped like sandpaper on lead. All the others and now him! She refuses to go the site of the collapse saying: No I am not going. There is nothing to be done there, God knows. It was here that the whole business started and it is here that we'll fight it. God gives me strength, he'll be the last. (200)

Her keen observation of the events helps her to give a thought to the accidents happening around: "What do you mean... you know very well what I mean. You've heard it before. You're not a child. Frowning Abusa was the first. Then Mast Ram. Then the others, and now this. Are they accidents?" (200) When entreated to narrate a story, Zindi, as a story teller and like the audience is as ready to participate in a ritual exorcism:

In the fog of silence hanging in the room, the gurgling of the narjila echoed eerily, like waves on a distant cliff. Karthamma shivered and shifted closer to Zindi. The hair pricked on their necks and stood in runnels on their arms as they waited for Zindi to begin, yet again on her terrible litany of calamities.(201)



Highlighting the influential impact of Zindi, Ghosh says her:

That was Zindi's power. She could bring together empty air and give it a body just by talking of it. They could never tire of listening to her speak, in her welter of languages, though they know every word, just as well as they know the lives of the songs. And when sometimes, she chose a different word or a new phrase it was like the pressure of the potter's thumb on clay - changing the thing itself and their knowledge of it. (213)

This briskly paced narrative, at a deeper level, explores the struggle between the power of cold heartless reason and the nurturing power of human qualities which follow no rules, yet bring a healing touch to all mankind. As Kavita Daiya (2003) says: "This novel offers a grim exploration of the oppressions of migrancy, where reason and capital become metonymic, circulating forces in the world." (38)

Focusing on a motley group of migrants drawn from various parts of India on an imaginary island al-Ghazira and then Alergia, the novel marks the search for meaningfulness of those whose lives are displaced by globalization and whose very bodies bear the violent marks of the history. This historio-geography is brought into focus by Ghosh.

The chapter entitled *Becalmed* is the most revelatory and powerful in articulating Ghosh's vision of spatio-temporality. It gives readers a sense of the different lives, motives and aspirations of the passengers of the rickety boat Mariamma, which is taking them to al-Ghazira as migrant labourers. Incidentally, 'Mariam' is the South Indian name for Mary, and Mariamma means Mother Mary,

which includes ‘amma’. They’re all headed for al-Ghazira, a prosperous sea port of trade: the protagonist Alu, who is evading an incompetent Indian police apparatus and an absurd charge over a ridiculously escalated petty conflict between his ‘scientific’ Uncle Balaram, who is a man of reason, who applies logic to every small thing. He is interested in the School of Reason and establishes a school of practical reason and pure reason. He believes that every act of life has a purpose, so he establishes a third branch called School of Reason.

There is the traditional, corrupt, village landlord Bhubed Roy, Zindi, a ‘madam’, who runs a house of prostitution in al-Ghazria, Hajj Fahmy who treats all strangers warmly. Then there is Karthamma who was a companion to Zindi and was picked up by her to be a prostitute. Karthamma’s desire for the forms is a desire to realise a potential everyday life. For her a ‘home’ refers not just to the domestic space of a house, but also to a community (national or otherwise) in which one has a place. Her desire for form is a desire to realize the potential of everyday life.

Her fixation on the forms whose names she doesn’t even know, demonstrates the extent of power that those disempowered imagine as held by bureaucracy and the law. Here the forms are the reified representations of the abstract guarantee of the right to possess property (and not the right to property) and the right to have a home (and not right to a home). Here, Patricia Williams’s critique of “*Critical Legal Studies in The Alchemy of Race ad Rights*” (2003) is forcefully illustrated: for those without rights, the guarantee of the right (however abstract), is critically important and necessary, because it confers upon the minorities and disempowered person a legitimate, equal, existential status as a human being. Karthamma’s desire in this sense

also proclaims the legitimacy of a place like al-Ghazira - that promises a modern everyday life. Thus, or perhaps after all, the privileges of birth and citizenship hold meaning and value only in the context of the wealth of nations. The forms indicate not only a bureaucratized, regulated experience of life (and Karthamma's faith in it), but also hold out the promises of a middle-class lifestyle in a capitalist nation-state. Karthamma's act of imagining a better life for her son is an act of necessity. It is determined by an objecting condition she seeks to leave behind. Thus it is formulated not so much a fantasized, imagined, possible future, but instead, as a rejection of the past (in a spatial as well as temporal sense) which determines it. Her fantasy then must not be named resistance or agency, because it neither materializes into an active, political, intentional act against the power relations it is embedded in, nor does it transform the context in which it is situated.

Ghosh thus adds other dimensions to Appadurai's (2003) account of agency in globalization through the experience of the gendered subaltern migrant. If Appadurai emphasizes the agentive aspect of imagination, Ghosh urges us to attend to the forces that determine how agency concretely plays out, and to the effects of this imaginative agency. *The Circle of Reason* then, follows up Appadurai's proposition to theorize "certain fundamental disjuncture between economy, culture, and politics"(324) by explicating the political limits of the subjective imagination constructed as an agent, especially when the subject is female, sub-proletarian, and outside a familial, but inside a patriarchal structure. Thus, it is through the violence and failures of globalization, that articulates a vision of the transnational to which Appadurai as well as Homi Bhabha signal.

Karthamma's desiring-production is a drama traumatically enacted on the stage of her body. She is suspended spatially (on -the high seas between nations), temporally (between a past -present and a present- future), and corporeally (between labor and childbirth) in the interstices. The intensity of Karthamma's trauma is sometimes expressed in her willed suspension between labor and childbirth. Here her womb becomes a battleground between agency and fate, creation and destruction, home and world. Despite and through her bodily pain, she attempts to realize her itinerant hopes. That the condition of her existence, and the social forces that over determine it ,already overwhelmingly preclude the realization of the 'newness' she imagines is not something that Appadurai can explain, especially when there is no irony whatsoever in what ends up as an unwitting (on her part) compromise between her and Professor Samuel.

The character of Rakesh appears in the second section of the novel. He was an ex-travelling salesman of Aryurvedic laxatives which he could never sell. He along with Alu migrates from India to al-Ghazria for better prospects. Prior to his travelling:

He was a travelling salesman for small Ayurvedic pharmacy in Bhopal which specialized for a patented herbal laxative. It was the only job he had been able to find-despite his bachelor's degree in commerce and that, too, only after a year's efforts.(182)

The most interesting character in the novel happens to be Jeevanbhai Patel - a businessman from Gujarat. The Durban Tailoring House belongs to him. Being a practical man, he constantly mentions money. According to him money is both knowledge and power. He is ostracized from his family on account of his marriage to

Bohra girl. He moves from place to place , loses his name and fame, struggles a lot in his life and after his wife's death once again succeeds in establishing his business. He is the founder of New Life Marriage Bureau. He lives under the shadow of death and one day he hangs himself with a belt, lonely without relatives.

This novel expresses the attempt of the novelist which is oriented to floating the events and the characters through a medley of metaphors and select ideas. The all-embracing structural principles of magic and irony eloquently 'weave' the total pattern of the novel and ideas, characters and metaphors are explicated through attendant motifs. Infact, the characters themselves are converted into possible metaphors. Their quest is for a specific structuring of their entity in the totality of their experience however trivial and absurd it is. The characters achieve this appropriation of their significance through their creative/manipulative capabilities.

The novel is not merely circular but a finely patterned novel. The journey from 'Satwa' through 'Rajas' to 'Tamas' the three parts of the novel is not a straight forward narrative but one full of resonances harkening back and forth like an unfolding raga circling and repeating notes and sequences of notes each contextually different.

Almost all the major characters try to understand and constitute the world and hence motivate their actions through patterning of some kind. The major characters in the various attempts of 'reading reality' create and float in a sea of metaphors.

Following the post modernist tradition, the metaphors used by Ghosh come a full circle. The most important one is the book *Life of Pasteur* which Balaram, Gopal, Dantu and Alu like for their own reasons. In all there are three copies of *Life Of*

*Pasteur* in the novel-Balaram's, Gopal's and the copy that Balaram gifts to Dantu. The book functions at various levels. The readers are first introduced to it in the text when Balaram worried about the seeming lack of emotion in Alu lectures to him about passion.

*Life Of Pasteur* has everything in it associated with Balaram and his rational outlook. He considers Pasteur his model and shapes his life since childhood with scientific temper and rationalistic outlook. But the intrinsic contradiction between the external and the internal realities throws his plans out of gear on many an occasion. His one ambition in his childhood was to study science and emulate the great masters of science, Pasteur and Jagdish Bose. But his teachers at Dhaka decide that he was good for the study of history and guide him accordingly to Dr. Radhakrishnan, the teacher of philosophy at Presidency College. His favourite pastime, the study of heads, often lands him in trouble but he does not give it up. With his uncompromising stand, he slowly gains control over the Rationalists at the Presidency by wearing it away from Gopal who, of course, was to remain his lifelong friend. When he was about to make a point regarding the Rationalists for the first time in the college, Gopal's sense of foreboding warns him that he was a man who could bring disaster to anyone he is associated with:

As he watched Balaram go, Gopal had a premonition: a premonition of the disaster he would call upon himself and all of them, if ever he was allowed to take charge of the society. He decided then, with an uncharacteristic that he would do everything in his power to keep that from happening. (50)

His wife Torudebi could not see that and sets fire to all his books. However, he retrieves one book - *Life Of Pasteur*. Then in a display of emotion and affection, he hugs Balaram and gives him the retrieved *Life Of Pasteur*. That night, when all that was left of Balaram's books was a pile of ashes and a few charred bindings scattered around the courtyard, Alu crept into Balaram's room. Balaram was sitting crumpled in his easy chair, his fingers in his hair. Alu climbed on to the arm of his easy chair and slipped a book out of his shorts into Balaram's lap. Then he put his arms around his neck. It was the *Life of Pasteur*. "This time the tears were Balaram's." (34)

So the book helps in forging a bond between generations and hence intimacy deepens. Later on when Alu takes refuge at Gopal's place, Gopal gives him a bundle of his clothes, some money and Gopal's copy of *Life Of Pasteur*. Now Alu, accompanied by this copy boards 'Mariamma'. Significantly, not the reading of the book, but its pages come to help Karthamma who refuses to deliver the baby without signing papers and then Prof. Samuel tears the pages of *Life Of Pasteur* and gives it to her to sign. The copy of Gopal is left behind at al-Ghazria. But later on, Alu comes across the copy of *Life Of Pasteur* in Mrs. Verma's library. This is Dantu's copy which was gifted to his daughter Uma Verma which was originally gifted to Dantu by Balaram. The book completes the whole circle. But this book does more than this. It, in a sense, is the cause for Mrs Verma's being in the Sahara in the first place. For she's Dantu's daughter. Dantu, Hem Narain Mathur, had been presented with this book by Balaram Bose. It is because of this book, Mrs. Verma tells Alu, that she became a microbiologist: "My father told me that microbiology was Pasteur's heritage, and that I was to keep alive." (395)

It is in her house that she comes across the book again in a completion of circle. She gives it away to him but he fumbles and the book falls open presaging death – Kulfi's death.

She dropped the book into his hands. He fumbled and it slipped and fell open on the floor. A paragraph underlined heavily in used pencil stared up at them from the open pages.

Read that bit out, she said quickly. What does it say? It always means something when a book falls open like that.

It's about death. Alu said: It says that without the germ 'life would become impossible because death would be incomplete. (396)

Fittingly she and Alu decide that *The Life Of Pasteur* deserves a funeral, along with Kulfi. So the book is cremated by them. This, signals Alu's completion of journey out. This is the note of hope at the end of the novel. Carbolic acid functions as a structural metaphor and runs throughout the novel like a cleansing mechanism. Balaram finds solace in it. This carbolic acid becomes a weapon not only against infectious diseases but against the wicked, the impure - against all enemies of man. It inspires a young Balaram's campaign for clean underwear, as it does his campaign against infectious diseases during the war.

In the second campaign it works as a psychological therapy, as a means of awakening the dormant villagers against the repressive suffocation unleashed by the village strong man Bhudeb Roy, as he marches to the place where Bhudeb Roy is addressing people and birds, carbolic acid, followed by standing outside his house



surrounded by drums of carbolic acid. This was taken as an act of sedition and extremist activity and hence the police raid.

In Tamas: “Death”, in a little lawn of Et Oued on the north-eastern edge of the Algerian Sahara Carbolic acid is converted into Ganga Jal to purify the corpse of Kulfi Dr. Mishra wonders in the small town of desert: “The world has come full circle.” (411) Thus, cleansing germs, corruption and commercialization carbolic acid finally performs the spiritual act of making the body pure and holy. Reason achieves new configuration as Balaram says: “Weaving is Reason, which makes the world mad and makes it human.” (58)

Balaram further elaborates the idea: “Weaving, is hope, a living belief that having once made the world one and blessed it with its diversity and it must do so again.” (58) Weaving almost becomes the expression of Alu’s self and at various points depicts his emotional state. His initiation into the world of weaving is an act of admiration for the pristine simplicity and creativity of Shombhu Debanath. It also becomes synonymous for his love for Maya. The loom functions as a viable metaphor for Alu’s longing for Maya and his mastery over the subtle patterns of weaving including the intricate jamdhani pattern coincides with his weaving over the love for Maya which is described in physical and psychological terms. The descriptions of the creature surge once again defies words and assumes magical incantation

So many words, so many things. On a loom a beam’s name changes after every inch. Why? Every nail has a name, every thirst of rape, every little eyelet, everything of bamboo on the handle. A loom is a dictionary glossary thesaurus. Why? Words serve no purpose; nothing

mechanical. No, it's because the weaver, in making cloth, makes words, too, and trespassing on the territory of the poets gives names to things the eye can't see. That is why the loom has given the language more words, more metaphor, more idiom than all the world's armies of pen wielders. (74)

Alu's search for a new technique on the loom is reflexive of his own search for his moorings. The nomic mode of description employed in this context with peculiar intones of different categories drawn from the objective world serves to underline the delicate 'buti work' Alu, of late, had mastered. This passion for weaving remains with him for the rest of his life long after the house of Balaram goes up in flames in which Balaram, Toru-debi and Maya are supposed to have lost their lives. In al-Ghazia his constant indulgence in weaving compensates for his silence for the tons and tons of bales, he creates speak eloquently on his behalf. However in the last section, when Alu does not have, thoughts and his being led by Zindi and even Kulfi, he has become unable to weave as his thumbs have gone stiff. But with reference to the curing of Alu's thumb, there is an implication of Alu's renewed activity of weaving.

Another traditional metaphor-sewing machine—occurs recurrently in the novel. We're introduced to it quite early in the text through Toru-debi. The sewing machine was a part of dowry to which she was quite attached. This sewing machine was with her after the trauma of her wedding night.

However, the machine breaks down while she's busy stitching blouses. But the machine does come to the rescue of Alu as compelled by Toru debi, he goes out to throw away the machine and thus, only he is saved while the houses gets engulfed by

fire. And Alu's slow recovery from the shock is helped by his seeing a sewing machine in a display window in Calcutta. It's the only time that he has something to say to Gopal who doesn't understand: "That day Alu had won a battle for his spirit." (155)

The journey as a motif runs turnabout the novel and unites its three parts. Characters cross borders with almost a biological necessity if not always the ease and non chance of migratory birds. This motif is particularly associated with the one who is on the run having been branded an extremist by the police and with Jyoti Das close on his heels always. He moves from Lalpukar to Kerala and then sets off to al Ghazria in the Middle East along with number of characters who travel in search of material wealth and more opportunities. Travel itself is converted into a homeland. For Jyoti Das more than the professional obligations, it was the prospect of seeing more kinds on his travels that urges him to move on in his pursuit of Alu. Ironically it was he who causes the journey from Ghazria through Alexandria, Egypt, Lisbon, Tunis to the little town of Et Oved.

*The Circle of Reason* appropriately ends with a new beginning - the renewed search for contexts and personal reaching. And the novel itself holds out hope for the success of these aesthetic quests.

The way Ghosh tells stories, makes story-telling itself a way of looking at the world. By letting his stories interplay with time and space, Ghosh achieves an original synthesis of two different concepts of time. Generally novelists tend to stick either to a chronological narrative or dissolve time into a kind of duration where past and present are indistinguishable. Ghosh chooses to engage in a different, more subtle adventure.

The importance of the circle lies in living another process, one which suggests that any relationship must rest on a dynamic and sensitive grappling with similarities and differences and to acknowledge this, given our immediate challenges, would be to explore and create the wholeness immeasurably richer than any narrow nationalist cliché.

Within a few months after the completion of *Circle of Reason*, Amitav Ghosh started his new novel which he eventually called *The Shadow Lines*, (1988) a book which led him backward in time to earlier memories of “a book not about an one event, but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individual who live through them.” (15)

As in his earlier novel *The Circle of Reason*, Amitav Ghosh takes the narrative beyond the national frontiers and opens out the narrative to encompass experiences that are cosmopolitan. These novel experiences are seen and understood through the narrator’s consciousness. A distinct hue and message that eventually combine to make the quest meaningful mark each experience. The name of the narrator is not revealed, as a part of the narrative design, its aim is to suggest a contemporary consciousness, an all-encompassing identity. But at the same time the narrator subtly fuses personal experiences to make the search a fascinating and living experience. As a young boy, his grandmother’s passionate nationalism and her poignant nostalgic reminiscences of her life in East-Bengal, opens the narrator’s mind to the meaning of naturalism and the unifying power of memory. As a young man he sees Ila’s desperate attempts to accommodate herself to an alluring way of life in London and her pathetic failure leads him to the realization of the limitations and incomplete nature of such

experiences. In short, neither of these two constitutes a totality of experience. It is the enigmatic Tridib, who opens the narrators consciousness to the power of imagination. This perception of the power of imagination helps him open his mind to new vistas of knowledge within and beyond the frontiers of this country. Armed with this superior imagination, the narrator sets out to forge an identity amidst the complex realities of a larger world.

It is basically a 'memory' novel that weaves together the past and the present, childhood and adulthood, India and Bangladesh and Britain, Hindu and Muslim. It is a social document and a political novel, a *buildings roman* and a postmodernist work of fiction. The novel belongs to that long tradition of fiction, which examines its symbolic relationship with fact and explores the role of the imagination creating and evoking reality.

The novel follows the *stream of consciousness* with its constant forward and backward movement between different times, realities and spaces which the author tends to make in different situations at different points. Using 'memory' as fictional convention or narrative principle to suggest that the past can be concurrent with present and geographical distances can be transcended. The deeply etched manmade lines separating nations, people and events can be blurred in the shadow lines where there is universal brotherhood and love. The removal of separating barriers can lead to a rich meaningful life which rises above the politically divided, tension filled and violence prone modern day world.

The title *The Shadow Lines* refers both to the lines of separation, and the invisible links, which bind all the characters. There are several lines of family

introduced - that of the narrator based in Calcutta; that of his grandmother's sister, associated with Dhaka and two further lines bringing in the story of Robi and Ila. The unnamed closest links are with Mayadebi, his grandmother's sister, and with her son, the enigmatic older friend through which the narrator experiences much of his life.

Like many modern novelists, Amitav Ghosh too discards chronological narratives. The story develops in the backward and forward looping', this is justified as *The Shadow Lines* is about growing up and understanding. Chronologically, the story begins with a passage of time when the narrator was not born. The year 1939 is historically significant for the outbreak of the Second World War and phenomenal changes caused by that agonizing epochal event. Mayadebi's visit to London around this time, her warm and consequential contact with the Price family and Tridib - May component of the story is recounted by Tridib to the narrator twenty one years later when the latter is an eight year old inquisitive child. Although May was a little baby, when Tridib saw her in London - and they have not met since then - a romantic relationship develops through correspondence between them transcending the shadow lines of nationality and cultural boundary. Amitav Ghosh explores the mysterious pull between Tridib and May and the abiding intimacy between the two families, when the countries were pitted against each other. This search for invisible links ranging across the realities of nationality, cultural segregation and social discrimination is the central theme. The author questions the validity of the geographical boundaries and celebrates the union of allies pulled together by self propelling empathy and attachment. Tresawen and Mayadebi, Tridib and May, Jethomoshai and Khabil rise above the

prevailing passion of war and communal hatred and thereby indicating the political logic of partition and border demarcation to define national and cultural peculiarities.

The opening of the novel is with the description of the protagonist's eccentric, eternal but always brilliant cousin Tridib, who is his mentor and guide almost an alter ego and who, exercises tremendous influence on the protagonist narrator from his childhood. He is given a world to travel by him and eyes to see them from Tridib's rational, detached eyes. When Tridib tells the narrator about his childhood at London, the child narrator tries to imagine Tridib as a small child. He tries hard, but can not imagine, Tridib as a small boy:

I remember trying very hard to imagine him back to my age, to reduce his height to mine and to take away the spectacles that were so much a part of him that I really believed he had been born with them.... in the end, since I had nothing to go on, I had decided that he had looked like me. (3)

Tridib was a storyteller, is happiest in impersonal places -coffee houses, bars, street corners etc. He spent much of his time in gossip with young never-do-wells at street corners and tea stalls - "He was a familiar figure within the floating, talkative population of students and would be footballers and bank clerks and small time politics and all the rest who gravitated towards that conversation -longing stretch of road between Garihat and Gole Park." (8)

Amitav Ghosh makes the narrator of his novel recall his own experiences with a fondness for instance, the narrator's recollection of an incident, pertaining to Tridib :

When I was about, nine Tridib once stayed away from his haunts for so long that regulars began to wonder what had happened to him. Then, one evening I heard that he had surfaced at Gole Park again. I found him and heard him say ‘I have been to London. I have English relatives through marriage. It was then that I cried: Tridib you made a mistake. You were in your room, smoking. There was a howl of laughter and a chorus of exclamations: You fraud, you liar. You haven’t been anywhere. Another sharper voice broke in and said, the fact is that he is a nut he has never been anywhere outside Calcutta.(12)

This was all to the distaste of the grandmother who had a rod grid - like belief about time: “For her time was like a toothbrush: it went moldy is it wasn’t used.... it begins to stink.” (4) Grandmother could always find enough reasons to scorn off the presence of Tridib. Not only the time factor was a sole reason, but even a careless attitude towards marriage disturbed her: “Every time she suggested him marriage he would laugh it off. This was a proof that he lacked the core of gravity and determination, which distinguishes all responsible and grown up men” (6)

Tridib’s niece, Ila, sometimes came to Calcutta and the narrator, as a child would wait for her arrival with fascination. To the boy, brought up with the humdrum routine of a small puritanical world, Ila appears “As an exotic butterfly with easy intimacy with places which are magical names in the boys atlas.” (11) He tries to remind her of their shared experiences, of her uncle’s stories. She’s surprised by the vividness of his memories, for she cannot understand how sitting in a little room in Calcutta. “Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see



them with.” (20) Ila had traveled all over the world with her parents, but too great an exposure to reality had erased the magic from her eyes, so that all those places on the map which are to him ‘a set of magical talisman’s are for her merely familiar, common place, dull, significant only by virtue of the position of ladies toilets in the airport lounges, which become for her the signs’.

As a child, the narrator gulps humiliation when his mother exposes his obsession with Ila’s expected visit to India: “I don’t know what is the matter with him? He’s been waiting for her for days. He asks her about her every night: where’s Ila? When is she coming? He won’t go to sleep at night until I tell him she’s coming soon”. (43)

The narrator is exposed as being vulnerable before Ila’s charm and is hooked on to her exotic appeal. It is her striking foreignness, her western ways and easy infirmity that attracts him. Her librated justness and overlay offbeat demeanor arouse Ila’s minds contemptuous dislike for her. While the narrator develops a mesmeric fascination for Ila in the flush of adolescence, his grandmother hates her vulgar transgressions. Ila’s disappointment exposes her wobble transplantation in the western culture. Her dislocation stems from her penchant for illusions devoid of any real understanding of the cultural interface. The adult narrator sees though Ila’s hidden anxieties and discomfiture. Her last words in the novel are aimed at consoling the narrator and her cousin that everything is all right between her and nick commenting on Ila’s role in the novel. She’s central to the narrator’s coming-of-age and functions as narrative scapegoat, a figure who acts as a lighting rod for a great many sexual and

cultural anxieties and the telling of whose unhappy and even sordid itinerary, especially her relationship with modern fable.

Ila lived in a world of self deception and shallowness. She's ultimately out of line with both the worlds-the natural as well as adopted and ends up belonging to neither. Her seeming cosmopolitanism only ends her losing her identity in an attempt to ape a borrowed one.

Ila's planning is counterpoint to Tridib-May kinship in the thematic framework of the novel. When the narrator looks at Ila's seductive foreignness with unstinted eyes in his mature stage, he notices her snooty ways now a cultural contradictions. Significantly the novel ends with May and the narrator lying in close embrace after the former has recounted Tridib's tragic killing in Dhaka. Tridib always appreciated May's ideals of humanitarianism and acts like her soul-mate.

Grandma plays an inspirational or redemptive role by rescuing the young protagonist from indecision or desperation, as we are in the handing relationship between Tha'mma and the narrator. She dominates the novel by her very presence - moving between generations -represented by her grandparents, her parents, his and her sibling Mayadebi's family, her son and daughter in-law and her own grandson, whose myriad questions asked and unasked hang loose in her head for a very long time. This is a story of a family, of people, of nations, of individuals with complex shadow lines psyches.

Amitav Ghosh through *The Shadow Lines*, traces the development and growth of grandma, Tha'mma's character encapsulates the futility and meaningless of political freedom which was otherwise suppose to usher in an era of peace and

prosperity for all. During the days of her childhood and growth, she had her sympathies with all those who were fighting for the cause of freedom: She had wanted to do something for them in a small way steal a list of their glory for herself. She would have content to run errands for them to cook their food, wash their clothes anything, but of course secretly” (39) and she did all this with, the contemplation to meet the same boy who was “shy bearded boy and was the member of one of the secret terrorist societies since he was fourteen ..... and was given to assassinate an English magistrate in Khulna and later deported to the infamous cellular jail in the Andaman islands” (38)

Our last glimpse of Tha'mma in the novel is when the India-Pakistan war of 1965 is declared: she is standing with her hair hanging in wet ropes over her face, eyes glazed, spectacles fallen off, smashing the glass front of the radio and gouging out flesh and blood against it: “We're fighting them properly at last, with tanks and guns and bombs” she says hysterically. (238)

In contrast to Tha'mma's nationalist militant fervor and hysteria Ghosh presents the quiet strength and sanity of the narrator's uncle, Robi. Through two to three strategic episodes, Ghosh builds up Robi as a person possessing intuitive moral convictions having the courage to stand behind them in the face of opposition.

Unlike Tha'mma's morality and convictions which are found by internalizing the rhetoric of the dominant patriarchal, nationalist cultures, Robi is less influenced by external power structures. His morality comes from within, and early in the novel, Ghosh establishes the fundamental sensitivity and humanity of Robi, when as a school boy he beats up the school bully, a boy much older than himself and is not tempted by

his victory, to occupy the bully's vanquished space. Ghosh is careful to point out the shaping influence of the patriarchal culture of India on Robi in the incident when he refuses to let his niece, Ila, dance with strange men in the nightclub: "You can do what you like in England, he said. But here there are certain things you cannot do. That's our culture. That's how we live" (92)

Bangladesh in which his brother is killed is then essential in enabling him to articulate a representative Indian consciousness. The senseless violence that kills Robi's brother and makes him victim to mob fury becomes part of his identity as post-colonial Indian.

Through Robi's rejection of the dominant ideology of freedom, and the narrator's articulation of the "special quality of loneliness" as the distinguishing feature of the people of the subcontinent, Ghosh is then attempting a critique of the construction of the shadow lines of borders as signifiers of freedom and nationhood. Through his critique of Thamma's version of nationalism, and the naivete of placing faith in national borders, Ghosh is pointing to the limitations of realizing identity through the discourse of nationhood. He articulates the need to conceptualize issues of identity in terms of larger cultural and historical collectivities. When the narrator discovers that the cause for the riots that he was trapped in as a child in Calcutta was the same one that gave rise to the riots that killed Tridib in Dhaka, he thinks to himself, the simple fact was that there had never been a moment in the 4000-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 or the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free - our looking-glass border.” (234)

The theme of the novel encompasses economic social, cultural and intellectual freedom, by exploring connections, distinctions and possibilities Amitav Ghosh shows that in a changing world different strands of nationalism and ideology will exist and even complete. The force of nationalism in the quest for freedom or ideology is often a source of violence.... so the shadow line’ between people and nation is often mere illusion. The force and appeal of nationalism cannot be crushed away (so easily), just as death by a communal mob I the by lanes of Old Dhaka.”(130) Further, expanding her views / ideas on Tha’mma’s comments, that her home in Dhaka, which was like a pastoral retreat a garden vision is now a reminder of death and communal border for the grandmother.

As it is extremely a poignant moment when she arrives in Dhaka but quickly realizes that it is no more her home. Tha’mma notices that everything has changed completely, even as the driver points out to her the new theatres and a hotel, first one refrain emerges from her lips:

‘It’s all wonderful. But where’s Dhaka. I can’t see Dhaka.’ (193)

However, it is only when she sees her old house, that reality stares them in the face. It is no longer the same old house, for when the sisters (Tha’mma & Mayadebi) reach there, they discover to their dismay that their house was crumbling, that in what was once a garden in their house there is now an automobile workshop and a large numbers of families were living there. The idyllic workshop and a large numbers of

families were living there. The idyllic vision of the house that Tha'mma had cherished over the years, had vanished subconsciously, she had rejected the historical act of partition history perhaps could explain the events leading up to this event, perhaps even explain why it happened, when it did. Earlier on when told that Jethbmoshai was still alive in Dhaka that the whole house has been occupied by Muslim refugees from India, she exclaims: "you mean our house has been occupied by refugees." (135)

One important reason for the grandmother to get to Dhaka was her desire to see her old house and bring her uncle, Jethomoshai to India. No sooner had she spent a few days in her sister's house, than the grandmother accompanied by Mayadevi, Tridib, May Price and Robi set out in the Mercedes car with the driver and a security guard of the High commission. The car had to stop at a particular point in the lanes of Dhaka, and they had to walk to the old house. Their uncle Jethomoshai, now called Ukilbabu, was decrepit and bedridden, looked after by Khabil, a cycle rickshaw driver and his family. The old man failed to recognize them; as for going to India, he had not believed in that. In fact, he had told his India bound sons: "But suppose when you get there they decide to draw another live somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, I'll die here." (215)

For Jethomoshai, Calcutta is now as much a foreign' city as Dhaka is for Tha,mma. No wonder he stubbornly refuses to leave the place even after he has been told about the communal violence in Dhaka. Senile and bedridden though Jethomoshai

is, he has a better grasp of reality that geographical boundaries has become tenuous and fluid because of the sabbatical upheaval in India. That is what he tells his sons when they begin to move out of Dhaka : “Once you start moving you never stop : I don’t believe in this India; - Shindia” (215)

The heart of *The Shadow Lines* is the death of Tridib and it is only towards the end of the novel that the narrator approaches this experience. It is a struggle with silence, as he has no words to communicate what happened. “It lies outside the reach of intelligence beyond words - that is why this silence must win, must inevitably defeat me, because it is not a presence at all: it is simply a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are no words.” (218) A little later he writes: “I can only describe at second had the manner of Tridib’s death : I do not have the words to give it meaning. I do not have the words, and I do not have the strength to listen.” (228) The narrator loved and admired Tridib as a hero so he finds it difficult to accept the fact of Tridib’s death:

So complete is this silence that it actually took me fifteen years to discover that there was a connection between my nightmare bus ride back from school and the events that befell Tridib and others in Dhaka.  
(218)

Violence is never described, only depicted in several ways eg. the riots of 1964 and the violence of Kulna are presented as newspaper reports. The trouble started when the sacred relic known as Mu-I-Mubarak – believed to be the hair of the Prophet Mohammad himself- disappeared from its place on 27th Dec. 1963 in the Hazratbal mosque near Srinagar. Two hundred and sixty three years after it had been installed.

Over the next few days life in the valley seemed to close in upon itself in a spontaneous show of collective grief. There were innumerable black flag demonstrations every shop and building flew a black flag, and every person on the streets wore a black band.(225)

But surprisingly there was not a single incident of Hindu Muslim animosity in the valley. Probably it was the gifted leadership of Maulvi Masoodi who “drew the various communities of Kashmiri together in a collective display of mourning.”(226)

While India was deeply agitated, Pakistan fanned communal passion, and spoke of “*genocide*”. Fortunately the *Mu-i-Mubarak* was ‘*recovered*’ on January 04, 1964 by the officials of the Central Bureau of Intelligence and Kashmir heaved a sigh of relief. The protests in Pakistan subsided only in Khulna a small town in the distant east wing of Pakistan, a demonstration turned violent.”Some shops were burnt down and a few people killed.”(226) Headlines in the newspaper of Jan. 07, 1964 were : “Fourteen die in frenzy of Khulna” (228)

Riots spread from Khulna to the outskirts of Dhaka. The complexities of majority and minority communalism are also sensitively handled by Amitav Ghosh using the memory technique he links two events, riots in Calcutta and mob violence in Dhaka which led to Tridib’s death. The violence in Calcutta started on Jan. 10, 1964, the day the first cricket test match of 1964 series against England at Madras commenced. The narrator by recalling wicketkeeper batsman Budhi Khunderan’s maiden test century is able to focus on other event full happenings on that day.

On their way home: “The pavements, usually thronged with vendors and passersby were eerily empty now-except for squads of patrolling policemen.(202)” At



a particular point an unruly mob had thrown stones on their bus and chased it from its normal route. The boys began to sob, as they could not go home. “It would not be enough to say we were afraid: we were stupefied with fear.”(204) The narrator comments upon the quality of this fear in detail in many ways.

One feature which strikes every reader of Ghosh’s work is ‘movement’, whether historical, geographical, cultural or otherwise, his fiction has a continuously changing and evolving ambience. Infact, there is lot of movement in the novel, to and from places. Someone or the other keep going or coming back weather literally as in Tridib’s case or because of him, the narrator who travels a lot without actually traveling. Infact, journeying is the central motive of the novel. And it’s not only the characters who keep moving from place to place. The cyclical movement of the narrative which the narrator manipulates with the help of the stream of consciousness narrative pattern facilities the author to handle the movement across time from 1981 back to 1960’s to the 1940’s and beyond. The narrator goes into the past not only through, ‘memory’ but gives the ‘going to and ‘coming back’ a concreteness and audibility which a novel which has sweeping historical events as its backdrop requires. Ghosh employees references to houses, photographs, maps, road names, advertisements to give a validity to his perception of the times he’s writing about the very first line of the novel begins with a going away. “In 1939, thirteen years before I was born, my father’s aunt Mayadebi went to England with her husband and her son Tridib.”(3)

Although the novel is divided into two major clear cut sections, its structure is fragmentary. The first section is further divided into sixteen sections first as the

second one has fifteen yet the sections do not coalesce into sequential whole. There is no fixed center or narrative lines connecting the two. The main story line gets diverted by a number of other stories to the narration of global events. Points of fixity which earlier determined by ones', with or one's home even one's country become shadow lines. Every reader is forced to respond to the eloquence with which they convey 'a sense of place' and a 'sense of dislocation'. This sense of dislocation arising out of post modernity leaves the readers and the characters with a sense of chaotic upheaval born out of the feeling of fear and which is completely justified in the contemporary contexts of our lives. This entire condition of '*dislocation*' is completely juxtaposed to the '*sense of place*, which is teamed with warmth, security and a feeling of permanence.

The opening of the novel suggests a 'historiographisation' as does the background of wars against which the narrator plots his own history and that of others. One might question the use of the term '*history*' for a retention which might be called autobiography or a biography. Autobiographical discussions are intended to bring readers closer to the real world of people to the turmoil divisions and conflicts that they experience in their everyday lives.

The history referred to is the history of imagination, which although it occurs at a certain time and in a certain context of other acts of thought, emotion, sensations; the thoughts - regarding that past - are Tridib's, while the narrator goes on a mnemonic journey visiting the places which figure in Tridib's past. Thus space and time are both juxtaposed and coalesced together in the novel.

Ghosh's novelistic experiment with *'The Calcutta Chromosomes'* ( ) gives birth to a whole new sub-genre in India English fiction, a tale simply but engrossingly told 'wonderfully clever', immensely entertaining', 'an extremely ingenious scientific thriller', but more than that, as always Ghosh wrestles with history, the history of malaria as much as that of the fevers and deliriums of colonial exigencies. Sub-titled: *A Novel of Fever, Delirium and Discovery* it has metaphors and motifs used in plenty along with the adventures of enigmatic L. Murugan. Time is used as an important element along with myth, superstition, science and grandma's tale combining to make an entire novel.

This novel subsequently came to be known as *first science fiction in Indian English* though Ghosh himself labelled it as a *Cyber novel*. This novel grapples with the colonialist's notion of 'science' (discovery) and the 'native' (counter scientific, 'fevers' and 'delirium'). It re-considers Eurocentric dualism set up between Science and Magic/Mysticism in which the colonies supposedly embody the latter, and re-plays the Man-Machine wars on native territory with surprising turns of 'discovery'. 'Discovery' as in the novel is an abstract personification of agency.

This novel talks about a quest that belongs to different times and places and which are motivated so differently are thus juxtaposed from the beginning itself: Antar's for Murugan, Murugan's for the truth behind Ross's research, which too was just as much a quest as Antar's and Murugan's quest for the research. Indeed, all the characters in the novel, unlike as they are, are entangled through their individual quests and connected in other devious and subterranean ways with one another and

with one greater quest of all life, for immortality: hence the device of the story within-a-story and the quest-within-a-quest.

The most striking characteristic of these inextricably interlinked characters is, paradoxically, their alienation from their immediate surroundings; for any quest to succeed, it seems that the seeker must be free from the bondage of conventional social relationships and must survive poverty, disease, exploitation, marginalization, anything and everything that might weigh down the human spirit like Antar and Murugan, Urmila Roy, Sonali Das, Phulbani, Laakhan, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Mrs. Aratounian, Ross, Grigson and Cunningham. In a scientific thriller, everything is resolved satisfactorily at the close of the novel, but in *The Calcutta Chromosomes*, the theme of search for immortality moves through a never-ending line of female characters. As described in the novel the character Mangala is portrayed as a Goddess-like figure who has found a so-called cure for syphilis but has also acquired knowledge of transcending life beyond life. The colonized Mangala is the upholder of the cult of secrecy and by this weapon she controls Ross, Forely, Grigson, Cunningham and all those so-called white male investigators of the malaria parasite. Mangala uses the potent weapon of silence to score intellectually, over her male counterpart Ross and others. She tries to find a cure for syphilitic parasite through 'counter science' or faith. The story of the novel moves through the closing years of the nineteenth century into the whole of the twentieth century and then passes on to the early years of the twenty first century. Apparently, it covers the colonial and the post-colonial years of Indian history. Of course, the writer's liberty of rejection, selection, and creation has been judiciously exercised by Ghosh.

The novel begins sometime in the early twenty-first century, when Antar, an Egyptian computer programmer and systems analyst in New York, suddenly finds the ID card of an old colleague flashed on his computer screen. As he recalls the name of its owner, he is aroused by something more than ordinary curiosity, and begins his search for L. Murugan, who, he finds he had noted himself in a file, had suddenly disappeared from Calcutta on 21 August 1995, one day after he had reached the city, which was, coincidentally, perhaps, but appropriately, called World Mosquito Day. Murugan was a man obsessed with the early history of malaria research, and especially with the career of Ronald Ross, who had won the Nobel Prize for his discovery in India of the life-cycle of the malaria parasite. Murugan's own conviction was that there was some "Other Mind," some person or persons who had guided Ross towards his discoveries and away from other avenues of thought.(31) After all, records show that Ross had never been academically inclined or research-oriented, and had started on his quest for the malaria vector only after Dr. Patrick Manson had urged him to test his (Manson's) ideas about how the world's oldest and most widespread disease is transmitted. All Ross's discoveries were in fact serendipitous, and were always made, by a strange coincidence, only when Lutchman, a helpful 'dhooley-bearer,' was present. The inevitable conclusion, believed Murugan, was that Ross:"thinks he's doing experiments on the malaria parasite. And all the time it's he who is the experiment' (67) ,conducted by poor illiterate natives of a colonized country-a reversal of conventional wisdom about scientific thought and progress and an ironic glance at the popular Western images of Oriental inscrutability and menace in Fu Manchu and his ilk.

Murugan's brash ways and his single-minded pursuit of his subversive hypothesis had alienated him from the scientific community and had caused concern among his friends and colleagues. But he had managed to persuade his employers to let him go to Calcutta, the place of his own birth and childhood as well as of Ross's discovery, in order to pursue the truth. The quests that belong to different times and places and which are motivated so differently are thus juxtaposed from the beginning itself. : Antar's for Murugan, Murugan's for the truth behind Ross's research, which too was just as much a quest as Antar's and Murugan's quests for the research. Indeed, all the characters in the novel, unlike as they are, are entangled through their individual quests and connected in other devious and subterranean ways with one another and with the one greater quest of all life, for immortality : hence the device of the story-within-a-story and the quest-within-a-quest. The most striking characteristic of these inextricably interlinked characters is, paradoxically, their alienation from their immediate surroundings; for any quest to succeed, it seems that the hunter must be free from the bondage of conventional social relationships and must survive poverty, disease, exploitation, marginalization, anything and everything that might weigh down the human spirit. Thus, Antar is a Coptic Christian from Egypt in New York, orphaned early and a childless widower, working alone from home; Murugan is obviously a South Indian Hindu born and brought up in Calcutta and-in a sly glance at the common colonial habit of Anglicising Indian names-calling himself Morgan; he is a divorcee and another lonely researcher with Life Watch. For Murugan seems to out-American the Americans in his breezy speech-patterns, so that the Empire strikes back, again, through him.

Murugan was born in Calcutta, although he left it at an early age. He was as a graduate student of Syracuse that Murugan first discovered the great love of his life: the medical history of malaria when he was in New York in a small college, he pursued his study of the early history of malaria research.

Ghosh, through his character Murugon, shows the motifs that animate the plot of the novel. Murugan demonstrates through his readings of the journals of the Nobel Prize winning bacteriologist, Ronald Ross, what looks and sounds like a path-breaking scientific research, is actually its mockery. In Murugan's reconstruction of the 1890's, Ross is progressing in his research because some people are helping him through the maze. The story of the novel moves through the closing years of the nineteenth century into the whole of the twentieth century then passes on to the early years of the twenty first century. Apparently, it covers the colonial and the post-colonial years of Indian history. Of course, the writer's liberty of rejection, selection and creation has been judiciously exercised by Ghosh. The novel opens in the early years of the twenty first century when Antar an Egyptian computer programmer and system analyst in New York suddenly finds the ID Cards of one L. Murugan, an old colleague and researcher, flashed on his computer screen. He discovers that Murugan had mysteriously disappeared on 21st August, 1995.

Allegory, a characteristic form of postcolonial writing creates, deconstructs, restructures, and reaffirms myths. The mythical characters from the *Ramayana* Laxman and Urmila, and Murugan the much revered God of South India (the eldest son of Goddess Durga) are interwoven into the text simultaneously, to reconnect the eternal war between *Satya* and *Asatya*. Through Murugan's anger and frustration the

post modernist “rage against humanism and the Enlightenment legacy” which permitted a unipolar perception. Murugan’s efforts also allegorise the sceptical questioning mental attitude which needs to be adopted by the self satisfied, smug, but manipulated masses who consume unconsciously all that has an aura of truth about it. In this sense, Murugan besides being a character in the novel becomes a symbol of post modern cynicism about the binary opposition of truth / falsehood. He is eventually proved in his research finding about the ‘malarial maze’, validates the viability of looking at things by looking through them. It is significant that the person on who is bestowed the Nobel Prize for medicine: “Doesn’t know a goddam things about mosquitoes: he’s never even heard the word anopheles.” (66) Ross succeeds, because “they” want him to, and it is “they” who first dry up malaria patients for Ross and then give him Abdul Kadir and Lutchman to steer him along the right track. It is, infact Lutchman, who besides being his patient (guinea pig) and retainer also becomes Ross’s guide, planting useful ideas in his head. Ross, instead of doing experiments on malaria parasite becomes “the experiment on malaria parasite.” The agenda consists of immortality inter body migration – through the mutation of the parasite. One reason of Murugan’s coming over to Calcutta is to partake of the immortality.

Ghosh throughout the storyline subverts the superiority of the western scientific investigation and proves that not only were they far behind the scientific progress made by India but here, it had been spearheaded by a woman. The search for ‘immortality’ is carried on by Mangala, and Lachman. Ghosh has granted them great liberty and decolonized the members of the lowest social strata: the sweeper and scavenger class.



In the novel, the boundaries between the real and the unreal are quickly dissolved. The entire drama of the novel is seemingly accepted by the Hindus, the Muslims and the Christians. Ghosh in fact, suggests a broad based acceptance of the theory of 'transmigration of soul' by the colonized and the colonizer.

Ghosh, the fiction writer turns himself into a historian. In fact, his role is not much attend as 'both history and literature and interested in power' and 'etymologically' the two words are the same and only in English have they separated in hit way'. A constant blending of fact & fiction has generated a situation where past has lost its antiquity. By crossing over the physical time, the writer has created new allegorical meanings.

An important tendency of postmodernism is its reduction of experience to 'a series of pure and unrelated presents'. The past loses its pastness and is made to fuse in the present becoming some aspect of the present. The dissolution of the temporary boundaries may also include foreshortening of the future.

The seeming ambiguities and contradictions in the novel resolve themselves into a comprehensible compact work as the book is approached through the prism of postmodernism. Further, this postcolonial writing mystifies the real and demystifies the mystified. Amitav Ghosh in this novel has rearranged the simplistic equation of life, death and immortality to prove that 'manipulated' when used artistically can establish theories which are true and yet stranger than fiction. It records a web of interconnected moments that focuses not on the idea of a scientific research, but on the search for immortality: 'a fresh start': "Just think, a fresh start: when your body fails you, you leave it, you migrate - you or at least a matching symptomology of your self.

You begin all over again another body, another beginning. Just think: no mistakes, a fresh start.”(91)

Ghosh in this novel raises countless questions, but delving deep into his mysteries created by physical, meta-physical, geo-physical and spatio-temporal images. This gives credibility to our world that contains the voice of logic and illogic, matter and antimatter, science and anti-science. With this, the role of history ends and anthropology enters. Anthropologists do not merely note down facts of what they observe; rather, they construct accounts of their experience of other people’s experience. And these accounts “are thus fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are something made, something fashioned – the original meaning of fiction – not that they are false, unfactual, unreal ‘as if though experiments.” Geertz says: “In the end, it may be in a deeper understanding of the and in ‘History and Anthropology, ‘a complement that progress lies.” (334) Amitav Ghosh, in *The Calcutta Chromosome* joins history and anthropology to produce a fiction.

*The Calcutta Chromosome* is kaleidoscopic in structure, a little alteration makes a remarkable varying in pattern uniting the past with the present with an aim to visualize the future. The novel in the beginning reads like a medical case history, unifying certain facts with fiction to a state of mind where a reader makes a compromise with himself and allows himself to be carried away along with the forces of narration related to Ross’ discovery of malaria.

The time span is stretched to the history of near about hundred years studded with events more of a mysterious and supernatural nature. ‘Ava’s flashing of the badly damaged ID Card on its screen arouses the curiosity of Antar, the Egyptian archivist

working at his New York apartment in the early first century. When the computer Ava projects the holographic projection of the man to whom the card belonged, Antar immediately recognizes him as L. Murugan and starts his search on Ava and the details he gets through the small screen of his computer.

The details in the first four chapters pacify the readers through the make believe world, where science attains equal mastery over the human brain as there is a good rapport shown between the two.

Murugan's obsession with the early history of malaria, the career of Ronald Ross, the Nobel Laureate and above all the undercurrents of the belief that some internal force initiated the idea regarding the cause of malaria in the mind of Ross, continue as a very significant part of the main theme. The mystery does not end very soon. It enlarges its spell when Murugan tells Antar:

Let me put it like this. You know all about matter and antimatters right? And rooms and anterooms and Christ and anti-Christ and so on? Now let's say there was something like science and counter science. Thinking of it in the abstract, would you say that the first principle of a functioning counter science would have to be secrecy? The way I see it, it wouldn't just have to be secretive about what it did; it would also have to be secretive in what it did. It would have to use secrecy as a technique or procedure. It would in principle have to refuse all direct communication, straight off the bat, because to communicate - to put ideas into language would be to establish a claim to know - which is the first thing that a counter science would dispute. (88)

Murugan further enhances the argument with an explanation:

Not making sense is what its about conventional sense that is, may be this other team started with an idea that knowledge is self contradictory; maybe they believed that to know something is to change it, therefore knowing something, you have already changed what you think you already know so you don't really know it at all: you only know its history. (88)

Every character lends his own share at intensifying the mystery. Phulboni's observation goes a step ahead in this direction: "Mistaken are those who imagine that silence is without life; that it is inanimate, without either spirit or voice. It is not: indeed the world to this silence what the veil is to the eyes, what the mind is to the truth, what language is to life....." (24)

Murugan's research in this direction is a part of this mysterious conclusion that in 1890 a secret India team, under the leadership of an enigmatic young woman called Mangala had obtained much information in this field. A victim of hereditary syphilis, Mangala was found by Dr. Cunningham at Sealdah Station and was trained as a laboratory assistant. Murugan takes her to be genius:

They probably didn't give a shit anyway. But there was this one person, a woman who took to the lab like a duck to water. Within a few years she was way ahead to Cunningham in her intuitive understanding of the fundamentals of the malaria problem.(202)

Mangala's secret investigations regarding the syphilitic patient, in Cunningham's laboratory and the observations how certain chromosomes were found

in the non-generating tissue, the brain could be transmitted through malaria are as Murugan calls them The Calcutta Chromosomes.

Lutchman and Mangala belong to the last phase of the nineteenth century. They continue to be an influence in 1995. Lutchman/ Lachman / Lucky/ Laxman/ Lakhan, all these names belong to the same person but in different situations and at different times. This is well indicated as ‘switching identities’.

The novel can be described as the narrator’s journey both forward and backward in time and space in order to decipher intense meaning of life and existence. The conceptive plots in the novel give vivid effects to the meaning. It is an attempt to impose pattern on experience Ghosh has unwrapped the variety of characters and their lives, whether they belong to the contemporary society or to the nineteenth century. He remains a chronicler of events, men, places and social environment and thus the novel becomes a literary touchstone mapping geography – both cultural and psychological. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is able to set a new trend when people around Murugan confirmed their being with him: “we are with you: you’re not alone; we’ll help you across.” (256)

In the novel, Amitav Ghosh tries to establish that the existing modes of thought and belief are dangerous to human life. The novel seems to capture and interweave into its fabric accurately the chaos and the violence of everyday life. It relates them clearly to the inner realities of human existence. It also puts forward the paradox that life finds substance through secrecy and silence and, to some extent, rejection of rationality. Ghosh had chosen thriller pattern for the novel to present his message and

ideas effectively. Urbashi Barat (1999) interprets that significance of Ghosh' choice of employing thriller pattern states:

Ghosh's choice of the thriller pattern for his novel becomes especially interesting when it is seen as an ironic take off on the way in which stores of medical and scientific discoveries and inventions are popularized in children's books, science fiction tales, Reader's Digest and the like as who's who units and chases (220)

Though the medical history asserts that Ross discovered the deadly female mosquito on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1897, yet Ghosh has altogether deviated from his fact. It is a distinctive novel taking up the issue of Malaria and Mystery. In everyday life of India, thousands of people die of malaria disease but it has been for the first time presented in the fictive form. The subject has been treated most seriously blending it with mysticism and mystery, supernatural and superstition. The writer regards it as the philosophy of science and counter science. He writes:

...Now let's say there was something like science and counter science? Thinking of it in the abstract, wouldn't you say that the first principle of a functioning counter-science would have to be secrecy? The way I see it, wouldn't just have to be secretive about what it did (it couldn't hope to beat the scientists at the game anyway); it would have to be secretive in what it did. (89)

By blending several events in to the fabric of the novel, Ghosh makes the narrative delightful. The episode of Murugan's disappearance, the medical history of malaria, experiences of Antar and some other scattered events which happened in

Calcutta, have been deftly woven into the fictional fabric. Actually speaking, a major part of the story takes place in Calcutta 1930. The laboratory of the P.G. Hospital of Calcutta has been the place where Ross made the final breakthrough in his research. He discovered the cause of malaria in Calcutta (India).

Ghosh finds the game of power politics behind the choice of place. He believes that in the colonial rule, India like other Britain dominated countries, was considered to a country full of dirt and squalor. The ruling-class people did not have proper regard for the countrymen. as in their opinion India was backward and poor country for them. Shubha Tiwari maintains:

The fact that Ross discovered the cause of malaria in Calcutta (India) has deeper connotations for those who are conscious of colonization... Since mosquito cannot be taken as a symbol for cleanliness, the place where it resides, is naturally dirty. Ghosh, in fact, uncovers the whole power politics of the West (53).

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Ghosh has employed polytemporal time scheme. He frequently shifts from past to present and present to future. He shuffles time, and the reader gets confused. Perhaps his aim is to co-relate historical events with the present day issues which modern man is confronted with. Gajendra Kumar (2001) aptly remarks: “The Calcutta Chromosome is a novel in which poly temporal time-scheme has been employed. In the poly temporary time schemes there is a constant shift from past to present to future.” (46)

In *The Calcutta Chromosome* time and space are deliberately jumbled but this discontinuity becomes meaningful. The constant shifts in points of view and time

sequence erase the boundaries between hunter and hunted. However, the novel plays with the movements so effectively that it may come to an end but not its story. It challenges some of the fundamental concepts of the Western philosophical, historical and literary traditions. Ghosh examines the history seems to merge with the harsh realities of present day life.

With the help of the flashback technique Ghosh gives a vivid account of the history of Murugan's life. He had his own ways, and was a single minded person. As such he alienated from the scientific community. This caused concern among his friends and colleagues. Somehow he managed to leave New York for Calcutta, the place of his birth and childhood as well as of Ross's discovery in order to pursue the truth Murugan is obviously a South Indian Hindu, born and brought up in Calcutta. There is a satiric echo in his slangy speech of the brash Indianization of the English spoken by Quick-Gun Murugan of popular television. He seems to outdo the Americans in his breezy speech-patterns, so that the Empire strikes back again through him. Barat maintains: "The quests that belong to different times and places and which are motivated so differently, are thus juxtaposed from the beginning itself..." (222).

Besides dealing with the life-style of Indians like Urmila Roy, Sonali Das (Bengali Hindu in Calcutta), Phulboni (a Bengali Muslim born in Orissa) and, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Ghosh throws light on the life histories of some foreigners such as Mrs. Aratounian (an American Christian), Antar, a Coptic Christian from Egypt, Ronald Ross, Grigson, Cunningham (Englishmen), Farley, an American and Finnish spiritualist, Madam Liisa characters in contrast to Indians to show the difference of



attitude between them and the Indians. Commenting on the presence of the foreigners, Barat says:

The foreigners embody the continuing interest of the West in the spiritual quest of the East; the colonized world asserts its superiority over its colonizers in what is their greatest pride and professed weapon, the matters of the intellect. (223)

The novelist had made an attempt to establish links between these apparently desperate people and the vastness, the all-inclusiveness of the conspiracy is proved. No doubt the novel seems to defy the Western convictions about knowledge, death, immortality, reincarnation and literary activity. In the Western conventional sense knowledge is impossible for, "to know something is to change it, therefore in knowing something you have already changed what you think you know so you don't really know it at all, you only know its history" (Barat 88).

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