Chapter I

Introduction

The novel as a literary genre has not had a very respectable ancestry in Indian Literature in English unlike epics, lyrics, dramas and short stories. In 1864, the first Indian novel Raj Mohan’s Wife by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee appeared. Later, a significant contribution to the history of Indian Fiction in English came out in the nineteen twenties with the publication of K.S. Venkataramani’s Murugan, the Tiller (1927). It was properly developed and enriched by the trio called, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao. The Indian English novel of that period was dominated by the political, social and ideological ferment caused by the influence of Gandhi.

Indian English writers through Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra, Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy are important writers in the world of English fiction in the contemporary scenario. Vikram Seth became popular with A Suitable Boy. Equally, Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things became a famous novel. Hence, India has contributed significantly to the overall World Literature in English. A good member of novelists on the contemporary scene have given expression to their creative urge in no other language than English and have brought credit to the Indian Fiction in English.

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta on 11 July 1956. His father was first a Lieutenant Colonel in the army and later a diplomat. Ghosh grew up in East Pakistan, in Sri Lanka, Iran and India. He attended the Doon School in Dehra Dun and then received a BA in history from St. Stephen’s College, Delhi University in 1976 and an M.A in Sociology in 1978. He received a diploma in Arabic from the Institute Bourguiba des
Langues Vivantes in Tunis, Tunisia in 1979 and then a D.Phil in Social Anthropology from Oxford University in 1982. As part of his research work, he went to Egypt to do field work in the village of Lataifa in 1980. He also worked for a while as a journalist for The Indian Express in New Delhi. He has been a visiting fellow at the centre for social sciences at Trivandrum, Kerala (1982-1983), a visiting Professor of Anthropology at the University of Virginia (1988), the University of Pennsylvania (1989), the American University in Cairo (1994) and Columbia University (1994-1997) and distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature at the Queen’s College of the City University of New York (1999-2003). In the spring of 2004, he was visiting professor in the department of English at Harvard University. Now, he lives in New York with his wife Deborah Baker, an editor at Little Brown and company and their children, Leela and Nayan. About becoming a writer, Ghosh admits:

I was twenty eight. The city I considered home was Calcutta, but New Delhi was where I had spent all my adult life except for a few years away in England and Egypt. I had returned to India two years before, upon completing a doctorate in Oxford, and recently, found a teaching job at Delhi University. But it was in the privacy of baking rooftop hutch that my real life was lived. I was writing my first novel, in the classic fashion, perched in a garret (The Imam 46-47)

Ghosh is the most cosmopolitan of contemporary Indian English writers. His significance has its roots in his cosmopolitanism. He is a writer who travels and maps and re-maps the world drawing connections across the boundaries of modern nation
G.J.V. Prasad in “Re-writing the World: The Circle of Reason as the Beginning of the Quest” admits:

It is this creative engagement with historical and political realities and truths, it is in this clear headed erasure and redrawing of 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 a great narrative skill and imagination, Ghosh weaves together a pluralistic and self-reflexive view of the world – one that challenges the smugness of accepted narratives and points of views and the certainties of post-colonial borders as well as generic boundaries.

(56)


Ghosh’s fiction has exhibited a remarkable geographical spread taking in for *Reason* India, the Gulf region and Algeria; for *Lines* India, Bangladesh and the United
Kingdom for **Land** India, Egypt and Africa; for **Chromosome** India and the United States; and for **Palace** Burma, India and Malaya. The cultural space for most of Ghosh’s characters is huge. It is a vast borderless region with its own hybrid languages and practices which circulate without national or religious boundaries.

Ghosh marked his debut as a creative artist with **Reason**. Its French edition won for him the Prix Medici estranger, one of France’s most important literary awards. **Reason** is about history’s victims, who are forced into exile by events beyond their control. It is a complex tapestry of stories of individuals whose lives overlap, pull apart, and separate. It is a story of obsession – obsessive rationalism that some embrace as science and others ridicule as insanity and obsessive manhunts. It is a detective story, a story of exile, a travelogue, women’s rights tract, a Marxist protest, a plea for humanistic camaraderie and so on. Commenting on the novel, Hanif Kureishi in “A Feast of Words” says that “**The Circle of Reason** is a huge, ambitious novel with a crowd of characters and themes, set in a number of countries, India, Yemen, Egypt and Algeria. It is like an immense pot into which scores of more or less random ingredients have been thrown” (40). It is a novel of exile / restlessness. In it, people from the old world are trying to cope with the new one as Ghosh weaves four strands: “the social, the social economic, the political and the metaphysical”. (Sengupta, “An Allegorical Tom Jones” 29). It is a novel which weaves together nations and continents. It unites people of different nations. Claire Chambers in “Historicizing Scientific Reason in Amitav Ghosh’s **The Circle of Reason**” says that “The novel is ostensibly a *bildungsroman* describing the journey of Alu, a Bengali orphan, from the obscure village Lalpukur in Calcutta [...]. It incorporates elements of the picaresque, the novel of ideas, the thriller of detective novel (with
Assistant Superindent of Police, Jyoti Das, trailing and alleged extremist, Alu, through several continents) and the Hindu epic” (36).

Reason is divided into three sections: Satwa: Reason; Rajas: Passion; Tamas: Death. In “Satwa: Reason” Ghosh sets the alienation between science and rationalism. “Rajas: Passion presents the cross section of the Indian society sailing in a ship to al-Ghazira. It shows the decaying and dying civilization, trapped in the vicious circle of materialism. The third section “Tamas: Death” sees the death of reason. Commenting on the structure of Reason, S. Prasannaranjan in “The Tenet of Lataifa” says:

It was an exuberant tour de farce with the folk tale charm of the Arabian Nights, a Don Quixote of another area. While narrating the evolution of Alu, the boy ‘with an extraordinary head-huge, several times too large for an eight year old and curiously uneven, bulging all over with knots and bumps’, Ghosh was at the same time engaged in a mega celebration of ideas and concepts. (13)

It encompasses in its thematic range science, philosophy, history, politics, culture, art and language.

In Reason, Alu is eight year old boy. He comes to sleepy Lalpukur from Calcutta to live with his uncle Balaram and aunt Toru-debi. He is given a nickname, Alu, by his phrenologist uncle as his large head looks like a potatoe. His parents have recently passed away in a car accident. Balaram and his brother have been long estranged. However, when Alu is orphaned, Balaram and Toru-debi decide to take in Alu and raise
him as they have no children of their own. Alu has the gifted capacity to pick up and speak so many languages. However, he rarely speaks in the novel. The boy is asked to refrain from school at fourteen and is encouraged by Balaram, the supposed scientist, to study weaving. Alu begins to take lesson from Shomphu Debnath, a master weaver. Alu proves to be a gifted child as he is not only good in languages but also proves to be one in weaving too. He surpasses his teacher in weaving.

Balaram discovers a book on *Practical Phrenology* at a second-hand bookshop in College Street on 11 January, 1950, the day that the physicist Madame Curie is visiting Calcutta. At that time, Balaram is working for *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and he wants to interview her. In the interview, he is mocked by the people and also mocked by the people at his office. So, he decides to leave journalism altogether and devotes his full energies to phrenology.

Later, the day after the incident at the airport, he accepts an offer of employment from Bhudeb Roy, who has decided to start a school in the remote Lalpukur about one hundred miles of Calcutta. Balaram becomes one of this principal teachers. Roy also quickly becomes a political bully in the remote village. He hires thugs to enforce his policies at the school and elsewhere. Very soon, Balaram and Roy become enemies competing for the minds and hearts of the villagers. Sixteen years on, in 1967, Balaram’s mind is beginning to show strain of biography of the discovery of reason, but people around him take him as a comic character. When Bhudeb Roy arranges Maa Saraswathi’s Puja (the goddess of knowledge) to garner favour with the Inspector of Schools, Balaram jumps onto the statue’s platform and rips of its head and declares it to
be vanity rather than knowledge. In response, Bhudeb Roy surreptitiously poisons the fish in Balaram’s pond. Then five of Roy’s sons attack Balaram’s eleven-year-old servant, Maya. In this incident, Alu, who is eleven years old, has to run and fetch Maya’s sixteen-year-old brother to defend her from possible rape by the Roy’s sons.

Later, when a plane crashes into Roy’s school and burns half of it to the ground, everyone finds it remarkable that Bhudeb Roy has had the foresight to see the disaster and to insure the school just two weeks before the fire. In response, Balaram seizes upon the destruction to found his own school. It is called the Pasteur School of Reason and is divided into two divisions: in the Department of Pure Reason Balaram teaches principles of sanitation and in the Department of practical Reason, his wife teaches students to tailor and Shombhu Debnath teaches them weaving. Shombhu’s son, Rakhal, gives up his revolutionary ways to become the school’s business manager. The new school seems to be a successful one. The third division, the Department of the March of Reason, the home base for Reason Militant is also added to the school. The third division begins by spraying carbolic acid throughout the village, disinfecting everyone and everything. But in this process of purification, Balaram completely disrupts Bhudeb Roy’s latest political gathering. The next day, Roy burns several of Balaram’s possessions to the ground.

Toru-debi responds very negatively to what she considers Balaram’s obsessions. After the fish poisoning, she has taken Balaram’s books from their shelves and threw them out into the courtyard, where she sprinkled them with kerosene and burned them all. Alu could manage to save only one book – Vallery Radot’s *Life of Pasteur* – and managed to give it to Balaram. Both Balaram and Alu consider this book as a sacred one
– a scripture. Further, Toru-debi completely loses her mind when all their possessions are burned by Bhudeb Roy. Still now, Bhudeb Roy is not done with his mischief. He incites Jyoti Das and the Police to attack Balaram’s compound and they inadvertently set after the explosives that Rakhal, the former-revolutionary-turned-business-manager, had resumed making. In the resulting incidents Balaram, Toru-debi, Maya and Rakhal are all killed. This has been executed by Parboti-debi with an assistance of Shombhu Debnath. Debnath’s wife also died some years before after giving birth to Maya. Now, Shombhu Debnath and Parboti-debi leave with their child and go to Calcutta. In fact, Bhudeb Roy set in motion Alu’s flight from northern India.

Alu is relentlessly followed by Jyoti Das in a pointless misidentification of the bad guy. Balaram’s friend, Gopal, helps get Alu to Calcutta, where he is introduced to Rajan. Rajan is a member of a caste of weavers that has family connections throughout India. They help him travel down to Kerala and to the small former French-Colony of Mahe. But five months after the fire that killed Balaram, Jyoti Das traces Alu to this out-of-the-way spot. However, just two days before, Alu had set sail to al-Ghazira with the former prostitute named Zindi al–Tiffaha. She has a house in al-Ghazira in an area called The Severed Head or the Ras, near the water. There, she takes in all sorts of refugees, some with questionable histories or occupations. There is also a Professor Samuel, whose obsession with what he calls the Theory of Queues seems vaguely reminiscent of Balaram’s fixation on phrenology and carbolic acid. There is also a young woman named Kulfi with buck teeth and apparently recently widowed and Karthamma, who gives birth to a boy on board, who is named Boss. There is also a travelling salesman, called Rakesh. When they arrive in al-Ghazira, they meet rest of the characters in Zindi’s
little world, including Abu Fahl, who drinks too much; Forid Mian, an old tailor, Jeevambhai Patel, by far the richest merchant in the area, Haji Fahmy, a wealthy teetotaller whose family had been among the earliest settlers in the area, handsome Zaghloul, the pigeon, and Mast Ram, who falls in love with Kulfi. When Kulfi fails to love Mast Ram, he sets fire to the village, burning fifty shacks to the ground and commits suicide. Later, a massive building called ‘The Star’ collapses and traps Alu in a very narrow furrow beneath the heaps of concrete. Strangely, as his aunt is looking out for him on high, two singer sewing machines prop the concrete slab up. Others begin to think that Alu is dead but he is freed after a few days from the debris. Alu begins to think about cleanliness and Pasteur. Alu’s mystical renunciation of profit sends Zindi into Paroxysms of concern, since she has hoarded money for years and years. She now sees her financial security threatened by the very people she has helped for so many years. She tries to get Jeevanbhai Patel’s shop from him by trying to get Forid Mian to marry her but Jeevanbhai commits suicide just before her plan. Jeevanbhai had been acting as a spy for the local magistrate. Through the magistrate, Jeevanbhai has to bring down the power of the law on a gathering of those who subscribe to Alu’s communist doctrine. Many are killed in the fire including Haji Fahmy, Rakesh and Karthamma. Once again, migration is called for. Zindi leads Alu, Kulfi, the baby Boss, Abu Fahl, and Zaghloul, to her native village. Zindi’s family rejects them. Even she had been abandoned long ago by her husband in Alexandria, when it was discovered that she was barren. So Zindi and her group head for Algeria. All along their trip, they are dogged by Jyoti Das who is still in pursuit.
In Algeria, Zindi has Alu and Kulfi pretend to be married and they call themselves as Mr. and Mrs. Bose. They are introduced to a small emigrant Indian community, Mr. and Mrs. Verma, Dr. and Mrs. Mishra and Miss Krishnaswamy, a nurse. Dr. Uma Verma is a microbiologist and the daughter of Hem Narain Mathur. Dr. Mishra is a surgeon. His father had been Maithili Sharan Mishra who had espoused fashionable socialism after attaining his degree from the London School of Economics but who had grown fat on various governmental Ministerial positions.

Jyoti Das becomes a house guest of Mishra’s. He inevitably meets Alu and his friends. Jyoti Das begs Kulfi for one night’s liaison and at the suggestion she has heart attack and dies. An argument ensues between Verma and Mishra over the possibilities of performing a proper Hindu funeral for her. In this conversation with Jyoti Das, Alu learns more of what happened when he and Zindi managed to escape the ambush of the protesters at the Star. Haji Fahmy, Professor Samuel, Chunni, Rakesh, and many others had not died but had been deported to Egypt or India. Haji Fahmy died of shock that same day. In the end of the novel, Alu, Zindi and the baby, Boss continue their migration west, at least as far as Tangier, where they bid Jyoti Das farewell as he heads to a new life in Europe. They then turn back towards al-Ghazira.

**Lines** is a narrative of three generations – the narrator’s Bengali family in pre-partition Dhaka and Calcutta and their English friends, the Prices whose histories encompass both world wars, the left Book Club and shades of contemporary London. It also sets out to illuminate the absurdities of borders and frontiers, the lines of disillusion and tragedy. It may be taken as the novel which includes the search for identity, the need
for independence and the difficult relationship with culture, the rewriting of colonial past. It also includes issues of identity, freedom, and cross-cultural contradictions in the backdrop of communal violence.

In *Lines*, chronologically, the narration begins in 1939 when there was the outbreak of second world war and India was passing through a colonial rule. The narrator was not born then. The narrator has met May Price when she came to Calcutta on a visit. The next time when the narrator met her was seventeen years later when the narrator visited London. However, the novel takes these seventeen years from the year 1962 to 1979 as the effective background of *Lines* against which Ghosh deals with postcolonial situations, cultural dislocations and anxieties and interprets the issues of fractured nationalities in close and telling encounters. The themes include immigration, cultural assimilation, friendship across borders, and adjustment with the altered face of the world.

In *Lines*, the opening section ‘Going Away’ introduces its characters – the narrator’s family of his grandmother, his parents, his grandmother’s sister Mayadebi, her diplomat husband, and her three sons; Jatin, an economist with the UN, Tridib; the narrator’s uncle and mentor, Robi, and her grand-daughter, Ila (Jatin’s child) who is always away with her parents. The narrator’s grandmother is a product of the past. She has within herself an unflinching faith in the sanctity of political freedom. She is an example of the historical forces and an understanding of the present. So, it becomes an autobiographical novel or the family saga / chronicle.
In *Lines*, the time sequence is jumbled. The crucial events occur in 1960s but the narrator is recalling them in the 1980s and they are rooted in the period just before the World War I. Thus, in 1939, thirteen years before the narrator was born, his twenty-nine-year-old great aunt, Mayadebi went to England along with her husband and their son, Tridib. In later years, she always had the aura of a movie star for the narrator. She was his grandmother’s only sister. His grandmother never approved of Tridib, whom she considered lazy. The narrator disagreed with his grandmother’s appreciation and estimation since he loved Tridib’s healthy imagination that resulted in an endless supply of stories. Tridib took ample advantage of the narrator’s youthful tendency toward gullibility. Tridib had two brothers. One was two years older, frequently away since he worked for the United Nations. His name was Jatin. The other brother was much younger, named Robi. Tridib was only one of the three who had spent much of his life in Calcutta, living in the old sprawling family house in Ballygunge with his grandmother. The narrator thought that his grandmother did not just approve of Tridib but actually feared of him.

Mrs. Price, her daughter May and her son, Nick, lived in north London. Her husband, who had been one of her college teachers, had recently died. As it happens, Mrs. Price’s father, Loonel Tresawsen, had been stationed in India when she was young and he had become a good friend of Tridib’s grandfather, who was a judge in the Calcutta High court. The narrator met May when she came to India for a visit some years later and then did not see her for another seventeen years, when he returned the favour and visited England. He was, at the later period, spending a year in London doing research at the India office library for a Ph.D. thesis on the textile trade between India and England.
in the nineteenth century. By that time, May had become a cellist in an orchestra, but when she had visited India, she had just been learning the basics. When he attended one of her concerts, they became friends. She filled in many of the details of her life that the narrator had been wondering about all those years. She noted for example, that in 1959, when she was nineteen and Tridib was twenty-seven, they had begun a long correspondence. He had been sending her family Christmas cards ever since he had left England in 1940, but now he began writing specifically for her alone.

Ila is the narrator’s cousin, just a few years older than him. As the daughter of Jatin, the diplomat, she has travelled widely and seen a lot of the world. She lives very decidedly in the present. She is more sophisticated than the narrator but remains insecure in her personal relationships. She marries Nick and lives in Mrs. Price’s house in London. The narrator picks up tensions between Ila and her philandering husband. Some years earlier Nick had not defended Ila in an incident at school when she was ridiculed. He had left early to avoid being seen with her.

The narrator goes back to Delhi to take his University examinations, since his grandmother’s condition had improved a lot. Later, she dies in Calcutta in his absence and is cremated. He feels guilty of it. Tridib broods: “She had always been too passionate a person to find a real place in my tidy late – bourgeois world, the world that I inherited, in which examinations were more important than death” (SL 90). Near her death, his grandmother correctly surmises that he had visited prostitutes in Delhi and she passes the information along to his dean. In order to save his academic career, he denies the accusation. Part one of Lines “Going Away” ends with the narrator looking back
eighteen years, when Ila was going away from Tridib to London. Ila went away to London for University even though she knew he loved her.

Part two “Coming Home” begins in 1962, a momentous year for the narrator’s family. It was the year the narrator turned ten, the year his father became General Manager of his firm, the year his grandmother retired as headmistress of a girl’s school where she had spent twenty-seven years. In a year or two, his grandmother gradually receded to her room, where she began sharing her memories of her girlhood home in Dhaka. Grandmother tells the narrator how she had eventually married an engineer and spent the first twelve years of her marriage in railway colonies. She is like Ila. The narrator’s father had been born in Mandalay in 1925 and grandmother took him back to Dhaka once a year. But when he was six, grandmother’s parents both died. The narrator’s father and grandmother seldom visited Dhaka again but stayed in Mandalay. In 1935, grandfather died of pneumonia when grandmother was just thirty-two. After partition, she had never returned to the city. She used her degree in history from Dhaka University to get a teaching job.

In 1964, grandmother happens to meet a distant relative and comes to know that her family house in Dhaka is now occupied by grandmother’s uncle, Jethamoshai, who is now over ninety. Her sister Maya had moved to Dhaka when her husband had become Councillor in the Deputy High Commission in Dhaka. So, grandmother decides to visit May in Dhaka and to bring Jethamoshai back to India. She goes to Dhaka on the third of January 1964. The narrator is eleven at that time. Tridib decides to accompany his grandmother and to bring along May Price, who had been visiting from England. In the
end, Jethamoshai does not want to go back to India with them. But, they manage to get him in the car and attempt to leave. They soon find that the way is blocked by a mob. May urges Tridib to get out of the car and retrieve Jethamoshai who had wandered into the mob. When he tries to do so, Tridib is overcome by the mob and killed. After Tridib’s death, the narrator is sent to stay with his mother’s brother in Durgapur. Tridib is cremated and May leaves for London that same day. Mayadebi and her family return to Dhaka.

**Land** is woven around the history of Egypt in the eleventh century. It was published in 1992. It is a subversive history. It is written in the form of a traveller’s tale / travelogue. It is packed with anecdotes. It provides magical, intimate insights into Egypt from the crusades to operation Desert Storm. It abounds in stories, and also examines relations between the Indians and the Egyptians, Muslims and Jews, Hindus and Muslims. It is historicity in fiction. It looks at history from the angles of a postcolonialist. It juxtaposes the characters of twelfth century. It also deals with the time of Ghosh’s living and reveals two different civilizations of India and Egypt with diverse cultures of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

In **Land**, Gosh begins his account in Lataifa, the little Egyptian village where he stationed himself as an Oxford University graduate student in anthropology. Doctor Aly Issa, a Professor at the University of Alexandria, has brought Ghosh to the home of Abu-Ali. It is there that he rents a room during his stay in Egypt. Ghosh does not especially relish living there, since Abu-Ali, in his mid-fifties is a somewhat overbearing small-businessman. In fact, Ghosh describes him as "profoundly unlovable" (AL 23), but
recognises him as someone who prompts a rather fearful respect from the villagers. After
a while, Dr. Issa arranges for Ghosh to move out of Lataifa to Nashawy, a larger town.

Ghosh left Egypt in 1981, and it was not for another seven years that he could
again turn his attention with any seriousness to investigating Abraham Ben Yiju and his
slave. He had learned some Arabic to communicate with his hosts. He had also spent
time learning Judaeo-Arabic, a colloquial dialect of medieval Arabic written in Hebrew
script that Ben Yiju had used. To his surprise and relief, he found that the dialects
spoken in Lataifa and Nashawy in the twentieth century were not that remote from the
"sounds" he was reading on Ben Yiju's pages. He learns that Ben Yiju had apparently
lived in a Roman fortress nicknamed "Babylon" situated in the southern section of Cairo
referred to as Old Cairo or Masr, called by some "the mother of the world" (AL 80). It is
also known as Masr al-Qadima, Masr al-Atiqa, Mari Gargis. Fustat served as Egypt's
capital for more than three centuries. Fustat today is attached to the metropolis as an
immense rubbish-dump. The Ottoman Empire had reduced it in importance, and then the
Indian Ocean trade that had made Fustat significant was supplanted in the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries by European navies.

The synagogue, to which Ben Yiju belonged, was made up of some very
cosmopolitan individuals who had close ties with the Indian trade. Ben Ezra
congregation had a storehouse, as was customary, called a "geniza," in which all sorts of
documents were stored. By a strange set of circumstances, the contents of this particular
geniza were left undisturbed for more than seven hundred years. So that, upon its
discovery, it was described as being "the greatest single collection of medieval
documents ever discovered" (AL 59). In the late 1600s, a fever of Egyptomania swept across Europe, but it was not until the mid-eighteenth century that the first report of the Ben Ezra geniza was published in Europe. Surprisingly, it was not until the next century that a scholarly visit to the geniza brought its significant attention. "By this time," writes Ghosh, "the indigenous Jews of Cairo, those whose relationship with the Synagogue of Ben Ezra was most direct, were a small and impoverished minority within the community" (AL 85).

Meanwhile, while studying these documents and following their lead back into the ins-and-outs of Ben Yiju's travels, Ghosh was also reacquainting himself with Shaikh Musa and the others who had befriended him on his first visit. He notices that there are now many more Egyptians working outside their country, principally in Iraq. In fact, of his younger friends from Lataifa, only Jabir has remained in Egypt.

Ghosh continues his research and learns that Ben Yiju's father had been a rabbi. Two of his brothers, Yusuf and Mubashshir, are also mentioned in correspondence, as is a sister, Berakha. His mentor in business was the Chief Representative of merchants in Aden, Madmun ibn al-Hasan ibn Bundar. Without a definitive explanation available to him, Ghosh records that Ben Yiju apparently moved from Aden to the Malabar coast sometime before 1132, and did not return for nearly two decades. Ghosh surmises that he had left in order to escape some sort of blood feud. According to the Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta, who visited Mangalore some two hundred years after Ben Yiju, the expatriate community of merchants from northern Africa and the Middle East lived very sumptuously. Ben Yiju was likely associated more easily with the Muslim traders who
were fellow expatriates in Mangalore, and they all probably used a pidgin language to conduct business with the locals. Soon after his arrival in Mangalore, he frees a slave-girl named Ashu, and they marry. Ghosh notes that India, at the time, had a reputation as a place “notable for the ease of its sexual relations” (AL 228). He speculates that Ben Yiju might have converted her to Judaism before the marriage, or that they had entered into "a kind of marital union that was widely practised by expatriate Iranian traders" - that is, the "temporary marriage" (AL 230).

Ghosh also learns that, from 1143 onwards, Ben Yiju's homeland of Ifriqiya had come under successive attacks from Christians, and was ravaged by disease and famine. Most of his family, in fact, had relocated to Sicily without his knowledge. In 1149, he finally makes the trip back to Aden, now accompanied by his two adolescent children Surur (a son, who dies) and Sitt al-Dar (a daughter, who marries her cousin in Sicily in 1156). Three years after his arrival in Aden, he had apparently moved to Egypt, and at that point disappears from further historical records.

Ghosh travels to Mangalore in the summer of 1990 to see if he can learn any more about the slave mentioned in several of the Ben Yiju letters. He speaks with Professor Viveka Rai, an expert on the folklore of the area, and with a Jesuit priest named Father D'Souza. By a circuitous route, he concludes that the slave’s name was probably Bomma and that he “had been born into one of the several matrilineal communities which played a part in the Bhutacult of Tulunad” (AL 254). He further concludes that the relationship between Ben Yiju and Bomma was
[...] probably more that of patron and client than master and slave [...] in the Middle East and northern India [...] slavery was the principal means of recruitment into some of the most privileged sectors of the army and the bureaucracy. For those who made their way up through that route, ‘slavery’ was thus often a kind of career opening, a way of gaining entry into the highest levels of government. (AL 259-260)

True to form, therefore, it seems that Bomma eventually assumed control of Ben Yiju’s business interests in Aden, and that he assumed the title “Shaikh”.

The main narrative of the novel, Chromosome, involves a re-examination of the history of late nineteenth-century malaria research by a possibly deranged Calcutta-born man named Murugan (he is also known as Morgan) who works for an international public health company called Life Watch and uses an Americanized slang register, which characterizes him as a diaspora subject. Murugan has had a life-long obsession with the history of malaria research, which has led him to the conviction that Ronald Ross, the British scientist who was awarded the 1902 Nobel Prize for Medicine for his work on the life-cycle of the malaria parasite. Murugan believes that there is a secret history that has been erased from the scribal records of the colonial society and from medical historiography more generally. He has devoted himself to uncovering the hidden truth.

Murugan is first encountered through the mediation of another diaspora subject, Antar, a New York-based computer systems operator, who has been a former colleague of Murugan’s and now works for an international water agency which has absorbed Life Watch. In the opening chapter, Antar comes across a fragment of an ID card on the
screen of his computer and this sets him off on a quest to reconstruct the totality of the
card and then the recent life-history of its missing owner. The owner turns out to be
Murugan, a man whom Antar has interviewed a few years before—the novel is set in the
near future—on behalf of Life Watch, to try to dissuade him from a request to be
transferred to Calcutta, at a greatly reduced salary, so that he can pursue 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. Murugan has been reported as missing. He has last been
seen in Calcutta on 21 August 1995.

From this departure-point, the novel uncovers its intricate network of traces,
interweaving a number of parallel quest-stories which range from those of Ross and his
late nineteenth-century medical contemporaries through to Antar's pursuit of Murugan
through the resources of the Internet, which at this moment in the near future has already
become considerably more sophisticated than it was at the time when the novel was
published. In Chromosome, the Web assumes much the same role as weaving in
Ghosh's earlier work, functioning as a synecdoche for the interpenetration of cultures.

On the day on which Murugan arrives in Calcutta, 20 August 1995, Phulboni, a
famous writer, is being given an award to mark his eighty-fifth birthday. Receiving the
award, Phulboni gives a gnomic speech about the power of silence. Like Murugan/
Morgan, Phulboni has more than one name, more than one identity. His real name is
Saiyad Murad Husain; Phulboni is a pen-name. In his earlier life, Phulboni has
undergone a mysterious experience. As a young recruit to a British company, he was
sent in 1933, to a provincial town named Renupur. He has arrived by train at its deserted station, some distance from the town and in a landscape flooded by monsoon rains; and there, despite the station master's attempts to persuade him to the contrary, he decides to spend the night in the signal-room. A night of terror ensues. Objects move as though controlled by some telekinetic agency. Phulboni falls asleep, awakes to discover that the signal lantern is no longer where he has placed it and then sees it some fifty yards down the railway track. Assuming that the stationmaster is carrying it, he follows it down the line, and narrowly averts being killed by a train which comes hurtling down the track at this moment, even though the line is a siding and no train is due. In fact, the stationmaster has told him that the station has only ever been used once before. He appears to fall asleep again and wakes up the next morning to find the stationmaster telling him that the lantern has not been moved. And then he appears to awaken again, just in time to throw himself out of the path of another oncoming train. This time the experience is 'all too real' (CC 279). Phulboni subsequently speaks to the train's stokers and engineers, who are horrified that it has been directed into the siding, which they say has not been used for thirty years and where the tracks are rusty, overgrown and full of debris. When Phulboni suggests that the stationmaster may have "pulled the switch by mistake" (CC 279), the chief engineer of the train tells him there has not been a stationmaster at Renupur for thirty years.

The first part of this episode could well be explained away as Phulboni's fantasy or hallucination and the text is full of incidents which raise the possibility that those who experience them are Pynchonesque paranoid schizophrenics or fever-prone former malaria sufferers, experiencing recurrent bouts of delirium. Antar, Murugan and Ross
have all contracted malaria at some point in their lives, but, as in Pynchon, there is a body of circumstantial evidence to suggest that the dangers faced by the text's questers are all too real and that a secret Manichean counter-force may be at large in the world. Rather more than thirty years previously, in 1894, an American scientist, Elijah Farley, who appears to have discovered that a sinister conspiracy is manipulating the experiments of Ross's Calcutta predecessor, D.D. Cunningham (also known as C.C. Dunn), has been reported as having vanished after disembarking from a train at Renupur. It takes the form of Antar's super-computer, Ava's partly fictionalized reconstruction of a lost e-mail account of Farley's missing last letter, a letter which has itself mysteriously disappeared after Murugan has read it in a Baltimore library. Nevertheless, it posits the possibility of a startling link with the Phulboni episode. In this episode, the veteran guard of the train that has nearly killed Phulboni remembers a foreigner dying at Renupur in 1894 in an almost identical incident. At the time of the foreigner's death, the sole occupant of the station was a young man named Laakhan. Laakhan (also known as Lutchman—the shifting nature of names is a clue to the text's central revelation concerning the Calcutta chromosome which still lies ahead) has been one of the assistants in Cunningham's laboratory, whose conspiratorial activities Farley appears to have discovered. Laakhan/Lutchman has subsequently worked for Ross and there are also traces of his identity in a range of other contexts. He has a thumb less left hand and in the Phulboni episode, along with the evidence of poltergeist activity Phulboni has seen a mysterious imprint of just such a hand in the signal-box at Renupur. The elderly guard completes the story of what happened at Renupur in 1894 by telling Phulboni that, after the death of the foreigner, a stationmaster was found, an upper-caste man who regarded Laakhan and his
misshapen left hand as worse than untouchable and attempted to kill him by switching the points and leading him before a train, only to suffer the fate he has intended for Laakhan himself—a third instance of a narrowly averted or actual death of this kind.

What Farley has discovered is that Cunningham's work on the mosquito parasite is being hampered by assistants he has picked up at Sealdah railway station in Calcutta: notably Laakhan and a woman who is named Mangala. She appears to be both the high priestess of a secret medical cult offering a cure for syphilis and the brain behind the discoveries that will eventually lead to Ross's winning the Nobel Prize. Murugan's research leads him to the conclusion that Mangala and her associates are hindering Cunningham's research so that he will be replaced by Ross, whom they can use as a vessel for their discoveries. These discoveries are, however, concerned with far more than a malaria cure. They involve a counter-epistemology, which promises a form of immortality through the erosion of Western conceptions of discrete subjectivity, through the dismantling of the shadow-lines that construct notions of autonomous selfhood. This perhaps explains the text's recurrent destabilizing of notions of fixed identity by giving characters more than one name. Mangala's discovery of the means by which malaria is transmitted has come about as a by-product of her real research interest. Working outside the straitjacket of Western empirical methodologies, she has been attempting to evolve “a technology for interpersonal transference” (CC 106), a means of transmitting knowledge “chromosomally from body to body” (CC 107). In Murugan's view, the relationship between Mangala's counter-science and that of conventional scientists such as Ross is analogous to the relationship between “matter and antimatter [...] rooms and ante-rooms [...] Christ and Antichrist and so on” (CC 103).
Palace opens in Mandalay in 1885; when eleven-year-old orphan Rajkumar finds himself stranded when the Sampan on which he works as a serving-boy has to be put into port for repairs. He is from Chittagong, but his father had moved them to Akyab, an important Burmese port. En route, his family tragically dies of fever. His mother's dying words to him are: "Live, my Prince; hold on to your life" (GP 12) and that, in a nutshell, is exactly what he does, for good or ill.

In Mandalay, Rajkumar meets Ma Cho. She is half-Indian/half-Chinese, in her mid-thirties, and she runs a small food-stall. Ma Cho employs him as an errand boy. She introduces him to her "teacher" and lover, Saya John Martins, who is a Chinese contractor who also happens to be a Christian. He is something like an older Rajkumar, since he also had been orphaned and thereafter became a world traveller. He learned a good many languages in the process, but doesn't belong anywhere. Saya John introduces Rajkumar to his seven-year-old son Matthew; he is visiting from Singapore, where he attends a well-known missionary school. Saya John decides to employ Rajkumar, and Rajkumar moves into his home. They begin trading in teak.

As it happens, Rajkumar has arrived in Mandalay just as the British are taking over the country. In the thirty-year-old "glass palace" live twenty-seven-year-old Thebaw (1885-1916), King of Burma, and Supayalat. She is his haughty and ruthless chief consort, and has had assassinated all family members who might challenge her husband's right to the throne - there were seventy-nine such claimants. Her closest maids are orphans, and Dolly is the youngest and most beautiful of them.
Supayalat is clearly the power behind the throne. The King, on the other hand, is kept in blissful ignorance by his advisors. In fact, he had not stepped out of the palace in seven years and had never left Mandalay. In just fourteen days, the British force the King to surrender. As the troops enter the city, Ma Cho and others enter the palace compound, which had until then been completely off limits to them and ransack it. In the melee, Rajkumar encounters the maid, Dolly, and is so struck by her beauty that he puts back into her hands the jewelled ivory box he had intended to steal. Colonel Sladen escorts the royal family into exile - first to Madras, and then more permanently to Ratnagiri, hundred and twenty miles south of Bombay. They live in "Outram House," which is on a hill overlooking the town. A local man named Sawant takes charge of the servants. Dolly loses her virginity to Sawant. When plague breaks out, the villagers move up to the King's compound for greater safety.

In 1905, an Indian named Beni Prasad-Dey arrives in Ratnagiri as the new District Collector. The Burmese royal family and the few retainers who have not deserted have now lived in the town for twenty years. Beni Prasad-Dey has been educated in England and is, in fact, one of the few Indians in the British civil service who has such a high office. His wife, Uma, is fifteen years his junior, and she lives somewhat in his shadow. Their house is known as the Residency. Uma quickly makes friends with Dolly, who has become a beautiful and gracious young woman. Uma at this time is twenty-six and has been married five years; Dolly is just a few years older than her. Uma begins worrying for her and for the princesses, as well, wondering whether they are ever going to be able to marry. That is soon answered, as the first princess is found to be pregnant by Sawant.
To the annoyance of the British, but bitter delight of Supayalat, they marry and move away.

Meanwhile, in the inland Burmese town of Huay Zedi, situated on the Sittang River, Rajkumar makes friends with Doh Say. When they meet, Doh Say, a couple of years his senior, is an elephant herder working in the teak forests. Rajkumar determines to become wealthy and hatches a scheme to make money by importing workers from India for British oil fields. With this money and a bit from Saya John, he buys a large teak forest and after a good number of years of hard work, establishes a profitable plantation. He becomes quite skilful at negotiation and lands a plum contract with the company that is building a new railroad into the various teak areas. Part of his success is aided by Uma's uncle, D.P. Roy, who is a banker in Rangoon. This serendipitous connection leads Rajkumar, who is now thirty and rich, to decide to visit Ratnagiri and look for Dolly. He has never forgotten her since their very brief encounter so many years before when the King was exiled. He is an odd combination of romanticism and hard-headed business know-how. After much hesitation, Dolly is convinced that Rajkumar's love for her is genuine. The two are married in a small ceremony, presided over by Uma's husband. Supayalat, however, is infuriated: she had wanted Dolly to work for her forever, and she now refuses to see Dolly ever again.

As intermediary between the British and the Burmese royal family, Beni Prasad-Dey had been placed in a most awkward situation by the pregnancy of the princess and the prospect of her marriage to the Indian, Sawant. He comes across as a somewhat ineffectual and even comic pawn of the British. Now, however, he suddenly becomes
something of a tragic hero. The news of his demotion has come at an especially bad
time, since Uma had just decided to leave him and to return to her parents’ home. Prasad
cannot face this double reversal of his fortunes, and subsequently drowns himself in the
sea. Since her husband had filled such a significant governmental position, Uma now
received a substantial pension. She has freedom and money. She books passage to
Europe and in London she becomes a leader of the movement to free India. She visits the
United States and raises money for the cause and settles in New York where Saya John's
son, Matthew, was living. Matthew meanwhile marries an American named Elsa
Hoffman. Uma later urges him to return to visit his rather estranged father, who
increasingly is in need of his son’s help.

Dolly and Rajkumar had initially moved in with Saya John in Rangoon. This was
her first visit to Burma since she had left, twenty-five years before. Saya John and
Rajkumar's latest commercial venture was the growing of rubber trees and they had
established a plantation on Penang island. Elsa and Matthew come to live there, as well,
and Elsa gives it its name: Morningside Rubber Estate. Soon Dolly gives birth to her
first son, Neeladhri (Neel), who seems increasingly to have many of Rajkukar’s
characteristics. Four years later, Dolly gives birth to her second son, Dinanath (Dinu),
whose temperament seems a good bit like her own. Unfortunately, Dinu develops polio
but is taken to the hospital in time to avoid serious after-effects. But because Dinu is
frail, Dolly dotes too much on him. An odd thing had happened: the old Burmese king
for whom young Dolly had worked had appeared to her in a dream, warning her that
Dinu's fever was very significant, and the child had to go immediately to the hospital -
and he had been correct: it was, in fact, polio. The next day, after having seen the doctor,
Dolly learns that the king had died the very night that he had appeared to her in a dream. In fact, the king had died soon after the second princess had eloped with a commoner.

In 1929, Uma is fifty, and she writes to Dolly to tell her that she is leaving America and returning to Calcutta. Dinu is fourteen now; Neel is eighteen. Matthew and Elea had a daughter, Alison also has a son, named Timmy. Dolly decides to take her two sons to Malaya and invites Uma to meet with them at the rubber plantation at Morningside House. It is twenty-three years since they last saw each other, and that was in Rangoon. In this span of time, Uma has transformed herself into a political force. So Uma does visit Dolly, but she soon angrily denounces Rajkumar as a British collaborator. After this clash, she leaves for Calcutta. Her brother meets her at the airport in Calcutta, along with his twin children, Arjun and Manju, and the youngest child, his daughter Bela. Surprisingly, in the new setting, Uma's virulent political thinking soon changes drastically. As the Burmese rebellion fails, her thoughts turn to Gandhi's non-violent methods, and she volunteers her services to his cause.

If Uma has chosen the way of passive resistance, her nephew Arjun definitely has not. He enters the Indian Military Academy in Dehra Dun and happily finds an identity there. His sister Manju, on the other hand, hopes to become an actress. In a strange bit of serendipity, the producer of the film for which she had planned to audition turns out to be Neel, Dolly and Rajkumar’s son. A romance blossoms between the two and they are soon married. Arjun, meanwhile, is delighted at what he perceives to be an egalitarian spirit in the army, and is complimented by the position of leadership in which he is placed. Arjun is one of the few Indians at the Academy, named Hardayal, whose family
had a tradition of military service with the British. Despite his family's long connection to the British military, however, Hardayal is growing increasingly restless in that role, increasingly sceptical of the use to which the British are putting Indians like himself.

The pace of events in the novel begins to accelerate. Back in Europe, Britain is declaring war on Germany. In Rajkumar's world, the focus is on his developing pneumonia. He interprets the enforced rest as an occasion to reassess his businesses and decides to sell his properties before things become dangerous in Burma. He decides to sell all his assets to finance the purchase of great quantities of timber. He is anticipating that the British and Dutch will need to reinforce their defences throughout the East. Dolly accuses him of war-profiteering. Alison meanwhile receives word that her parents, Matthew and Elsa, have died in a car crash in the Cameron Highlands. Arjun and his battalion, up to this time having little to do, are sent to the frontiers of Afghanistan. That is where he first hears of a Sikh unit having mutinied in Bombay. Arjun and Hardayal are both full lieutenants now and are among the few regular army officers left in their unit. Hardayal's doubts grow, and they begin to plague Arjun, as well.

Dinu, now twenty-seven and very interested in photography, arrives at Morningside House and strikes up a friendship with Alison. With the death of her parents, she finds that the boundaries that shored up her identity have come loose. During his visit, Dinu falls in love with Alison. Just as momentously, he learns that the servant Ilongo is his half-brother.

Soon Arjun's battalion is on its way to Singapore. They work their way up the Malay peninsula as rumours of Japanese air attack begin circulating. Soon, various units
begin deserting. Arjun is wounded and has to hide from the invading Japanese in a storm-drain with his batman, Kishan Singh. Singh's comparatively lesser prospects in life had prompted Arjun to muse about his own place in history. The next morning they emerge from the storm-drain and are happy to find Hardayal, but he has by now allied himself with the Indian national movement, whose members have gone over to the Japanese side - at least for the time being. This is the last straw for Arjun, who despairs of his former course and decides to follow Hardayal's lead.

With the Japanese on their way, Alison, Dinu, Saya John, and Ilongo make plans to leave for Singapore, but when they reach the railway station they are horrified to learn that only Europeans would be allowed in the trains. The encounter brings Dinu to a kind of political consciousness (as his time in the trenches had done for Arjun), and he fights with the Indian officials who are enforcing the British rules by keeping the non-Europeans off the train. In desperation they head back to the plantation. Dinu encourages Alison to leave by car with Saya John, who is, of course, quite elderly by now, and Dinu promises he will try to join them in Singapore. They drive off and travel as far as they can before they decide to catch a bit of sleep. When Alison wakes up in the morning, she becomes very distressed in seeing that Saya John has wandered away. She looks down the road and sees that he is being questioned up ahead by the Japanese soldiers. She fires in their direction. Instead of scaring them off however, her actions prompt them to shoot Saya John immediately and then to head in her direction. As they approach her, she shoots herself - she has followed Beni Prasad-Dey's sad path.
In Rangoon, meanwhile, Manju has given birth to Jaya, a little girl. It might be a cause for celebration but there is little time for that: a representative of the Indian community arrives to warn them all to evacuate Burma that evening. Meanwhile, Neel has taken over management of his father's attempt to sell his properties and buy 'timber and has met with success - a victory that turns out to be pyrrhic. All Rajkumar's funds have been invested in one plantation, and when the Japanese bomb nearby, the elephants panic. Neel is crushed to death and the trees are destroyed in the melee. Rajkumar has lost everything - Neel and the money. Having waited too long, Manju, Dolly, Rajkumar and the baby now try to get away. They join some thirty thousand refugees who are trying to cross the river. In her own despair at the loss of Neel, Manju quietly slips beneath the surface and drowns herself – another member of the family lost to despair. She had recognised that Dolly and Rajkumar were a different breed of individuals – hungry for life – and she knew her baby would learn to grasp life far better from their ageing hands.

Dolly and Rajkumar stay with Uma in her flat for the next six years; then Dolly travels to Rangoon hoping to locate Dinu. Rajkumar never sees her again. In 1948, she finds Dinu, stays with him for a while, and then spends her last days in a nunnery. Jaya marries young, at seventeen, a doctor ten years her senior. In 1996, she is a college professor and her college sends her to an art history conference at the University of Goa. While there, she meets a pioneering photographer from the early years of the century and discovers that he is, in fact, her uncle Dinu. Though he is now eighty-two years old, she decides to visit him and finds that he works in a studio he calls "The Glass Palace." Dinu also quietly conducts classes much like those of Aung San Suu Kyi. Like her, he had
been imprisoned by the Burmese dictatorial military for three years. His classes focus on aesthetics, but they imply a philosophy with political ramifications.

Jaya learns that Dinu had left Malay shortly after Alison's death and had made his way to Rangoon in June of 1942. He had gone in search of Arjun and finally found him wasted away, wounded and dying. Dinu had gone on to marry Ma Thin Thin Aye, the young girl who had helped to shelter him when he had passed through Rangoon in 1942. The two of them came to a greater political consciousness from listening to the lectures given by Aung San Suu Kyi. Jaya tells Dinu that Rajkumar and Dolly, though far apart from each other, had both died within a few days of each other, both of them almost ninety.

_Tide_ tells the contemporary story of adventure and unlikely love, identity and history. It is set in the tiny islands known as the Sundarbans. In Sundarbans, life is extremely precarious. There may be attacks by deadly tigers and at any time tidal floods may rise and surge over the land. In this novel, Piyali Roy is a young marine biologist of Indian descent but stubbornly American. Roy is in search of a rare endangered river dolphin, Orcacella brevirostris. Her journey beings with a disaster, when she is thrown from a boat into crocodile infested waters. Fokir, a young and an illiterate fisherman helps her to rescue. They have no language between them but they are drawn towards each other strongly. They share an uncanny instinct for the ways of the sea. Piya engages Fokir to help with her research and finds a translator in Kanai Dutt, a businessman from Delhi, whose idealistic aunt and uncle are long time settlers in Sundarbans.
Tide begins with forty-two-year-old Kanai Dutt, who oversees an office of translators in New Delhi. He is standing on a railway platform observing Piyali Roy. When they end up in the same train compartment, he engages her in conversation. They are both heading from Calcutta to Canning in the Sundarbans. He had been there once for a few months in 1970 when he was a young schoolboy, sent to live with his aunt and uncle to "rusticate" him and settle him down for school work. His one friend from that time was a girl in her mid-teens named Kusum. But that was long ago and the current trip was to be his first return visit. The motivation of his trip after all these years is a bit of a mystery to him. He is going because his aunt Nilima told him that his uncle Nirmal had left a journal specifically for Kanai's eyes only. Although the journal had been written a long time before in 1979 (the year, in fact, that his uncle had died), it had only recently been discovered in some remote part of the house.

His compartment mate, Piya, had been born in Calcutta but had moved to the United States when she was just one year old. She did not know Bengali but she recalls that this is the language in which her parents had argued. She is now a graduate student in cetology at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in California, and on this trip is interested in observing the marine mammals that she thinks are unique to the Sundarbans. Her destination is the town of Canning, the train stop for that region. Kanai's real destination, on the other hand, is Lusibari, the farthest of the inhabited islands, where his seventy-six-year-old aunt runs a charitable organisation called the Badabon Trust.

Soon after they arrive in Canning, Piya hires a dubious guide and an even more dubious "guard" imposed upon her by the governmental functionaries. The two men
soon become quite threatening to this solitary young woman. More immediately, they approach and intimidate a poor fisherman whom Piya had hoped could direct her to the dolphins she wishes to study. In the process, she falls into the river and the fisherman, named Fokir, saves her from drowning in the salty, vegetation filled water. She pays her "helpers" to leave her with Fokir, who promises to take her to the dolphin region. Fokir does not know English, but they manage to do the best they can to communicate.

The Badabon Trust that Nilima Bose now runs, and the high school that her husband Nirmal had run until his death, were built over the site of a commune established by a British idealist named Sir Daniel Hamilton. The house is called "Lusibari," a pidgin version of "Lucy's House," and was so named for Hamilton's wife who had sadly died on her way from England to join him. Hamilton was a utopian visionary and he had bought ten thousand acres of the Sundarbans and invited impoverished people to come and populate the place, free to them on one condition - there would be no caste system, and no tribal nationalisms. Despite the crocodiles, tigers, snakes, and dangerous tides, despite the fact that they were farmers and would now have to become fishermen, many desperately poor people heeded his call and arrived. They moved to his commune in three waves - in the 1920s, in 1947 after Partition, and in 1971 after the Bangladesh war - and they helped Hamilton establish a semi-communist region where the inhabitants shared possessions.

In 1950, eleven years after Hamilton's death, Nirmal and Nilima Bose had come to Lusibari. They had been married for less than a year, and the reasons for their decision to move to this remote and tenuous locale were complicated. The year before, Nirmal
had attended the conference convened in Calcutta of the Socialist International. He had been teaching at Ashutosh College at the time. Nilima was one of his students; her grandfather had been a founding member of the Congress Party, and her father was an eminent barrister at the Calcutta High Court. Although her family did not approve of this marriage, they nonetheless helped arrange the move so that the two could take over management of Hamilton’s estate. When the couple arrived there, they saw utter destitution: much had fallen into decrepitude in the last eleven years. The Hamilton Estate was also crippled by lawsuits. Nilima established the Women’s Union and sought support from outside. By the 1980s, this had developed into the Badabon Trust. It had become, in short, her life’s work - though not, perhaps, her husband’s.

Kanai learns that his friend from his visit as a child, Kusum, had been abandoned by her mother, who had been tricked into working at a brothel and who had finally been literally worked to death there. In her mother’s absence, and to save her from the same fate, the Women’s Union had raised Kusum. She had eventually married Rajen, a poor man who had been made lame by a bus in Calcutta. Rajen had taken Kusum to see her mother in the brothel, and her mother had died three months after the two had married in her presence. The couple had a son and they named him Fokir, but just four years after the child’s birth, Rajen falls in front of a train and dies.

Almost as if to offer her son someone to take his father’s place, Kusum tells Fokir the story of Bon Bibi, a good spirit who fights with the evil spirit Dokkhin Rai for control of the forests and waterways. In the story, there is a man named Dhona who is seduced by the evil spirit into offering a young lad named Dukhey as food to Dokkhin Rai, who sometimes takes the form of a tiger. But Bon Bibi saves Dukhey at the last minute.
Kusum was passing on this legend from her own childhood memories. Her father had built a little temple in Bon Bibi's honour on the island of Garjontola, and her son Fokir—and, later, he and his own son Tutul—often visit there. The story has a strong and lasting effect, therefore, on her, her child Fokir, and her grandson Tutul, but Kusum sadly admits that Bon Bibi had not helped her years before, (when Kusum had called out to save her own father, from whom she had learned the legend), from a tiger. In fact, soon after passing along the story to Fokir, Kusum herself abandons him. This is because she had been told by her friend Horen that Dilip, the man who had forced her mother into a life of prostitution was now hunting for her—hoping to force Kusum to take her mother's place.

Nirmal writes his journal—the one that has now been bequeathed to Kanai—in the village of Morichjhapi the year after his retirement as headmaster. All through her years of establishing the Badabon Trust, his wife had thought he was a writer. In fact, however, the Journal is the first and last thing he has written since coming to Lusibari. In it, he is reassessing his life, which he thinks has been a failure, and reassessing his marriage, which he thinks has been overshadowed by his wife's dedication to the Trust and her dismissal of his leftist idealism in favour of her own pragmatism. Nirmal had gone to Morichjhapi to find Kusum. He wanted to warn her of the danger facing the Bangladeshi refugees who had recently fled to Morichjhapi from the resettlement camp in central India to which they had been sent. Morichjhapi was a tiger preserve, and the government considered the refugees to be squatters. When he reaches them in their dangerous and shifting region, Nirmal is won over to their cause. Kusum takes Nirmal to Garjontola, where the Bon Bibi shrine is. During the time that he has been protecting Kusum from Dilip, Horen has fallen in love with her. He now proposes marriage to her.
and they have sexual relations, but the next day she is killed in a massacre perpetrated by the government against the “squatters”. Her son, Fokir, is just five or six at the time.

The events of the journal, of course, have taken place a good many years before the events of the immediate story in the novel. In the present time, Kusum’s son Fokir is an adult, and is married to Moyna. Moyna is a very determined young woman who has managed to give herself an education. She wants to go to nursing school, but her family balks at the idea of her leaving them for further schooling. Their response to her desire had been to force her to marry Fokir. When he first meets her, Kanai immediately admires Moyna for her determination and ambition. Piya, meanwhile, hires Fokir to take her out to observe the dolphins for several weeks.

Horen and Kanai accompany them, and go off on their own for a while. Before he and Horen can get very far, Kanai senses that a cyclone is approaching. They also learn that Piya and Fokir have gone out in Fokir’s dangerously small boat. As the storm approaches, Horen decides that he can wait for the two of them no longer, and he and Kanai return to Lusibari. Meanwhile, Fokir has steered to Garjontola - in what amounts to a tender instinct handed on to him by his mother, and laden with the hope of Bon Bibi’s intervention on behalf of the poor - and he and Piya climb the highest mangrove tree and tie themselves to the trunk. The storm is soon upon them, pausing only momentarily before hitting them repeatedly with full force, followed by a massive tidal wave. Eventually, it subsides. When all has become quiet, Piya sees that Fokir has died in shielding her from the lashing. As he was dying, he was whispering his wife's and son's names to Piya.
Fokir is cremated. A few days pass. Kanai returns to New Delhi and then Piya reads the letter he has left for her. In it, he admits that he understands himself very poorly and he says he wishes her happiness. He leaves her a full translation of the Bon Bibi legend as a way to understand better Fokir’s spirituality and his struggles in his short life, and as an invitation to her to understand that, in differing ways, she was loved by both men. She knows that she had been drawn towards both of them, as if human relations reflected the ebb and tide, the mix of fresh water and salt water of the Sundarbans.

Piya leaves for a month, but then returns to work at the Badabon Trust. She has set her sights on raising money to see to it that Nilima's dreams will live on - first, by financing a house for Moyna and a college education for her son, Tutu. Piya has decided that she will also move the Trust in the direction of conservation of the endangered dolphins, in consultation with the local fishermen. She can commemorate Fokir, as well, because her Global Positioning System had recorded all the ins and outs of her many days of exploration in the Sundarban waterways with him. She inadvertently calls Nilima's house her "home," suggesting that she no longer wishes to wand but can now set down roots - even in this unlikely spot with its two daily tides. And Kanai is soon returning to write out what he remembers from reading Nirmal's journal. The book ends by the spirit of Fokir.

Ghosh has also written a large collection of essays such as Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma (1998), Countdown (1991) and The Imam and the Indian (2001). Ghosh’s Countdown is a brief book and a protest against the 1998 test of
five nuclear devices at Pokharan by the Indian government. It also considers the relations between India and Pakistan. The tests were carried out on 11 May 1998, two months after Atal Bihari Vajpayee became the Prime Minister of India. However, when Pakistan tested nuclear devices of its own on 28 May, the rupee fell into a historic low, the stock market index plummeted as prices soared in India. On the whole, John C. Hawley in Amitav Ghosh: An Introduction observes: “The book is a part of Ghosh’s larger project to imagine a ‘moral’ history; not a history of morality, but a moral way of imagining history” (31).

Ghosh’s The Imam and the Indian (1986) is a comparative study of intercultural studies in the late twentieth century between two superseded cultures – the Islamic and the Hindu. In it, Ghosh is traveling with the Iman in the west. Ghosh discovers that migration and cross-cultural encounters had always affected the life of these villagers. However, the only difference was that the pace of transnational travel had picked up in recent years. It illustrates the fact that people from different backgrounds are suddenly thrown together.

Ghosh’s another essay, The Slave of MS.H.6 (1992) is an ethnographic allegory that uses the past to speak indirectly about the present. It begins with the image of the Cairo Geniza systematically raided by Cambridge anthropologists and orientalists. It ends with the Indian researcher working in the bowels of an American library that recalls Fredric Jameson’s description of the post-modern space at the Bonaventura Hotel. Bomma remains the slave of Ms.H.6 of textuality. The archive is a synecdoche of post modernism with its globalizing tendency. In Philadelphia, Ghosh is travelling in the west.
and not with the west. It is as Robert Dixon in “Travelling in the West: The Writing of Amitav Ghosh” observes: The painstakingly specific and situated nature of his historical research and anthropological inquiry, and the way he has foregrounded his own location, not only in relation to his Egyptian informants but also to the intellectual and military culture of the west is a challenging model to literary critics, in the western academy whose critical practice involves the application of high theory to third world texts – we might call that ‘travelling in the East” (22).

Likewise, Ghosh uses history, fiction and fantasy for creating fictional and non-fictional works. His writings are always anthropological inquiries into human ways of life. **Reason** is a blend of history, fact and fiction with the journey motif. **Lines** is also a combination of historical facts (Tha’mma’s story) and fiction (May Price’s life). **Land** is a thorough researched novel where the past (Benyiju’s story) and the present historical facts (Ghosh’s research in Lataifa and Nashaway) meet. **Chromosome** is a fantasy – a science fantasy. **Palace** is a blend of again historical facts and fiction with an element of romantic fantasy of Rajkumar and Dolly. **Tide** is a factual record of the lives of refugees at Sundarban with Piya, Fokir and Kanai being fictitious characters. It is a recorded history of the event that broke out after the bangladesh war.

**References**


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