CHAPTER IV

Narrative Strategies

*Human selves are centres of narrative gravity since humans are programmed to extrude narratives as naturally as spiders spin webs or beavers build dams*

*(Dennet D.C. as quoted in Rukmini Bhaya Nair, 2000:7)*

Postcolonialism is an emergent twentieth century critical practice that reached full definition in the last two decades of the twentieth century.
Postcolonial criticism involves analyses of literary texts produced in countries and cultures that have come under the control of European colonial powers at some point in history. After decolonisation the colonised people so far swept to the periphery and trifled and denigrated by the colonising West as uncivilized and barbaric, began to fight their way back to the centre. The strategies adopted by the postcolonial writers to ‘write back to the Empire’ were many and varied. Dismantling narratives by polyphony, re-inscribing historiography, reinstating indigenous wisdom, rejuvenating the rich cultural heritage of the past were some of the methods introduced by the writers of the period to assert their individuality and create national identity.

As a part of establishing the regained self or identity, attempts have been made to rewrite Eurocentric historiography by means of intuitive insights and observations of the East. History, like literature, is considered a human construct which can be reconstructed. Recasting and reinterpreting myths and legends become a prevalent practice among writers in order to make their works locally situated rather than universally relevant. The traditional monologic method of narration followed by the major European writers in their grand narratives gives way to polyphonic narration with multiple voices of narrators. Chronologically ordered narration is replaced by fragmented and non-linear presentation. The stream of consciousness technique which enables
the writer to delineate the running thoughts of the characters and the workings of their mindscape is supplemented by ultra-modern innovative techniques by exploring the possibility of the cyber world. The postmodern tendency of abandoning omniscient authorship becomes visible in the novels of the period. The omnipresent narrator who pretends to know everything and who makes judgement upon characters gives way to polyphonic or multi-voiced narratives because as Jessie Matz argues, ‘no one can know the workings of the mind of others’. As thought process is non-linear, fragmented narration is followed to give a realistic portrayal of the mindset of people.

Indian writers in English like Amitav Ghosh began to take a mature view of Indian reality and handled new themes with greater clarity and confidence by experimenting new methods to express novel ideas. This chapter tries to explore the writings of Amitav Ghosh in the light of the innovative narrative strategies that he has experimented with in his novels. Different narrative techniques are subtly interwoven into the texture and structure of his novels. Apart from the Indian oral narrative method, Amitav Ghosh explores the concepts formulated by the Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin in his novels. Bakhtin’s model of polyphonic text as a collection of multiple voices and consciousnesses free of authorial control and heteroglossia understood as the social diversity of speech types are
the literary theories deployed in this chapter to analyse the fictional works of
Amitav Ghosh.

The oral narration and orature is embedded in Indian literary tradition. Indian epics, the *Puranas* and *Ithihasas* like the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, *the Panchatantra* stories, the *Jataka* tales, the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Gitopadesham*, the *Upanishads* are all written in the form of transcripts of orally narrated stories. The Indian literary tradition and cultural ethos innate in Ghosh inspired him to give expression to his fictional works in a form best suited for highlighting the Indian culture and hence there is an abundant use of oral narration in his novels and travelogues.

As discussed earlier, Lord Yama imparted divine knowledge to Nachiketas in the form of oral narratives to which Nachiketas remained an eager listener and learned *Brahmajnana*. Ghosh follows a similar oral narrative method in his first novel, *The Circle of Reason* and tries to perfect the method through different narrators.

The traditional Indian method of story telling, unique in the cultures of the Eastern countries was quite unfamiliar to the West. The oral narratives recounted by Scheherazade in the *Arabian Nights* under the shadow of death, offer permanent enchantment to readers. Raja Rao has successfully made use
of oral narration in his novels. In *Kanthapura* (1938) Raja Rao characterises a grandmother whose stories are listened to with eager attention by her grandson. By resorting to these kinds of localised techniques, postcolonial writers show their resistance to the imperial centre and reject the traditional methods of narrations followed by the novelists of canonical literature. Thus, instead of mimicking the West, people started trying to rejuvenate their own cultural heritage and traditional practices of writing. The ultimate intention of these writers is to create an identity for themselves, which, they feared were lost in the colonial power structure.

*The Circle of Reason* centres round Alu, an orphan from East Bengal who reaches Calcutta to live with his uncle Balaram and Aunt Toru Debi, after his parents were killed in a car accident. His real name, finely scriptural, was Nachiketa Bose. But due to the shape of his head like an ‘alu,’ or a potato he was nicknamed so. Balaram, working as a teacher in Bhudev Roy’s school, incurs his employer’s displeasure by apprenticing his nephew, Alu to weaving and by engaging in the cleansing of the surrounding areas using the disinfectant -- carbolic acid. Bhudev Roy files a case against Balaram and instigates the ASP Jyothi Das who was appointed to investigate the case to arrest him. But the ASP finds the case insignificant and refuses to oblige. The oral reports that Jyothi Das, the investigator elicits from the litigant Bhudev
Roy and Balaram’s friend Gopal constitute the first part of *The Circle of Reason*. Alu too becomes one of the suspects in the case and Jyothi Das gives him chase while he escapes to Mahe, geographically located in Kerala. From there he migrates to al-Ghazira in a ship named *Mariamma* in which Zindi, a migrant woman from Alexandria in Egypt was herding poor women across the seas – keeping them shut away like prisoners in the cabin to sell them into slavery for doing hard labour as domestic servants and as prostitutes in al-Ghazira. With Alu’s migration to al-Ghazira in the Algerian Sahara, the second section of the novel begins. Zindi is the main narrator in this section. Her long stay in the Gulf country enables her to give authentic reports about the crucial events in the life of the migrant people. The precarious life that the migrants lead in the Gulf countries, how they fight out their life by trying their luck in various fields like business, weaving and tailoring, their ups and downs in life, helplessness, rootlessness and alienation are highlighted in the narration. Migrants, both literate and illiterate found abode under the roof of Zindi’s house and she provided them with tasty tea and coffee. Though the tea and coffee were a bit costly, they thronged to her house as they would get more news about the day-to-day events from Zindi’s mouth than from any other source. Chunni and Kulfi crouch on mats around Zindi whenever she narrates stories. “They could never tire of listening to her speak, in her welter
of languages, though they knew every word, just as well as the lines of songs” (CR: 213). The Indian practice of crouching around a convincing story teller and eagerly listening to the orally narrated stories is brought to light through instances like this.

The collapse of a huge shopping arcade constructed in al-Ghazira named the ‘Star’ is a turning point in this novel. Alu’s complicity with the mythical Nachiketas becomes significant through this event when he gets entrapped inside the debris of the collapsed ‘Star’ for four days without food or water, immersed in thought. The details related to the collapse of the ‘Star’ are narrated both by Hajj Fahmi and Abu Fahl but they give different versions. The visit to the collapsed ‘Star’, Alu’s hairbreadth escape from death and how he was kept alive under a heap of rubble with a steel girder across him holding up the massive concrete beams are narrated by Abu Fahl, while Hajj Fahmi and Zindi remain as the narratees. Abu Fahl claims that if he had not given the warning to Rakesh and others to run to their lives when he heard the rumbles of the falling Star, no one would have been left alive. According to Abu Fahl “the ‘Star’ fell because, though parts of it were strong the whole of it was weak because of bad cement and sandy concrete” (CR: 245). Alu could not escape because he had no experience; he knew nothing of building and construction and so he reacted slowly and got himself caught in the wreckage.
After furnishing his version of the story Abu Fahl sits back assured and commanding, accepting the thoughtful silence that has fallen on the room as a tribute to his good sense. But Hajj Fahmi teases him: You are wrong, Abu Fahl, and claims that he knows the real story, the true story. Abu Fahl challenges the old man; ‘If you’re so sure, ya Hajj, why don’t you tell us?’

Hajj Fahmi looked around him: Are you sure everyone wants to hear it?

Voices rose: Yes, there’s tea, and there’s tobacco and what else have we got to do?

Hajj Fahmi inclined his head, smiling.

It’s just a story (CR:245).

Hence it was Hajj Fahmi’s turn to present before the narratees, his version of the story. Before moving on to the core incident, Hajj Fahmi narrates many related stories with digressions twists and turns, a typical mode of Indian story telling. The feud between the Malik and the British on the question of signing the treaty to allow the British to dig oil from al-Ghazira, the imprisonment of the Malik and the exploitation of the oil-rich al-Ghazira are the highlights of the narration. Malik’s enemies including his half-brother
joined sides with the British to capture power and became rich. With the unaccounted money, Amir and his men built on a marshy, useless bit of land near the border of al-Ghazira, an immense shopping arcade called ‘an-Najma’ or the ‘Star’ which they knew won’t last long. Nobody knew where the money for the building came. Newspapers gave names of unknown companies. ‘Truth lies in silences’ (CR: 263). The money came from Jabal, the King of Eunuchs, who was once a confidant of the Malik. But Jabal and his friends did not want the ‘Star.’ They would be happier with the insurance money. Nothing that happened in al-Ghazira mattered much for the Amir as his money was far away in some safe country. Rakesh and Abu Fahl listen to Hajj Fahmi’s narration carefully. Abu Fahl dismisses the story and holds aloft his version. But Rakesh is not ready to agree with Abu Fahl’s views. According to him, Alu was the first to hear the rumbles and the noise of falling bricks and plaster and it was he who pushed the inmates including Rakesh out of the basement before Abu Fahl shouted to them to escape. They had already been running before they heard Abu Fahl. Alu was detained because of the two sewing machines he had discovered just at that time, and he was carefully covering them when the building fell.

Each narrator has got his or her own version of the story and hence there cannot be a real story. If it is a true story it ceases to be a story. The quest
for truth is an incessant process which entails reconstruction and retelling of stories. To reflect these phenomena, Amitav Ghosh makes use of multiple voices of multiple narrators, which is a characteristic feature of polyphonic novels. The duty of the main narrator is to deduce truth from the multiple voices. If a convincing deduction is not made, he should start his own quest for truth afresh. Story-telling has always been a part of human life. Every time when it is retold, it is populated with the ideologies of the story-teller; and the linguistic register in which the story is told varies from person to person making the story heteroglossic. This type of narration provides life to the novel as it is a conglomeration of narrated stories. The Indian oral tradition must have inspired Ghosh to adopt the more sophisticated polyphonic method in his novels successfully.

Bakhtin identifies polyphony as a special feature of the novel; and he traces it back to its carnivalistic sources in classical, medieval and Renaissance cultures. Guerin et al. observe:

Bakhtin’s constant focus is on the many voices in the novel, especially in the way that some authors in particular such as Dostoevsky allow the character’s voices a free play by actually
placing them on the same plane as the voice of the author (Guerin et al. 1992: 350).

He has rejected the monologic form of the traditional novel in which the character’s voices, viewpoints, philosophies and the diversity of their social worlds are all objects of an encompassing authorial knowledge, and thus subordinated to that unified monologic artistic design, where authorial voice is always the final word. Bakhtin’s first criterion for a text to be considered polyphonic is the freedom and independence of characters from the hegemony of the author.

A character’s word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author’s word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character’s objectified image as merely one of its characteristics, nor does it serve as the mouthpiece of the author (Bakhtin, 1984:7).

Ghosh’s novels are polyphonic where he allows his characters absolute independence and refrains from imposing his own moral or ideological control over their destinies. ‘Instead of being illuminated by a single authorial consciousness, a plurality of consciousnesses with equal rights and each with its own world’ (Bakhtin, 1984: 6) populates his novels. Different characters-
cum-narrators take up their roles in the novel in their own unique linguistic
registers leading to the entry of heteroglossia into the novel. A curious
observer can notice variations in their dialects which in turn form into
different registers and idiolects, in accordance with the differences in the
social, cultural and economical status. The characters develop out of their
dialogues; a compendium of these dialogues, with individual dialectical
variations constitutes the style of the whole novel. Thus variety and diversity
co-exist in the woven texture of the novels. Each character establishes his or
her individuality by their special way of narration. A conglomeration of
narratives by varied narrators with equal number of avid narratees imparts
uniqueness to the novel. The narration of the unending chain of stories
becomes an incessant process, which goes on and on without any absolute
conclusion and the novels remain open ended.

Polyphony and heteroglossia are attendant concepts of dialogism. The
discourse of dialogism has been taken up in recent years by critics working in
the area of literary and cultural criticism. Dialogism has been productively
applied to textual analysis. Dialogics implies interaction of words in a
sentence to provide full intentional meaning of a sentence or interaction of
voices, most often exhibited by means of dialogues. A novel achieves full
meaning due to the dialectical interplay of different voices, different scenes,
images and shots. The overlapping of images may lead to montage. All these will intensify the idea that the writer wants to convey through the novel. Similar to the cinematic meaning which is the result of the dialectical interplay of shots; novelistic meaning is the result of dialectical interplay of words, shots, scenes and images.

The narration of *The Shadow Lines* filters through the consciousness of an unnamed adult male narrator. He looks back into his childhood and intertwines his personal experiences with the major historical events of colonial and postcolonial India. The beginning of the story is set in the colonial India, when the Second World War began. The narrator was not yet born at that time. The novel opens with a statement: “In 1939, thirteen years before I was born, my father’s aunt Mayadebi, went to England with her husband and her son Tridib” (*SL*:1). The novel reaches its climax when Tridib is murdered in a street riot near his mother’s home in Dhaka. In 1979, the narrator recollects the memories of a Hindu – Muslim riot that took place in Calcutta in 1964. The novel stretches over four decades, it deals with the story of three generations and builds upon the life and interactions of two families - the narrator and his relatives in India, and May Price and her parents in London. Tridib is the major story teller in this novel in the midst of a multitude of stories and narrators.
He gives the legacy of his memories, experiences and recollections to the protagonist-narrator who then actively seeks to reconstruct the history of his family, which can be seen as an allegorical representation of the history of India.

The first section of the novel ‘Going Away’ begins when a native is going away to the land of the coloniser. Robert Dixon argues:

Unlike the usual colonial travel in which Westerners travel to India to absorb an ancient and self-contained culture, *The Shadow Lines* begins with an Indian passage to England: the natives are the travellers (Dixon, 2003: 18).

The recollected stories are dispersed within various geographical locations: the War-devastated London, the post-Partition East Bengal and the riot-hit Calcutta. It tells the story of three generations introducing characters throbbing with life from different nations, religions and cultures. The deployment of chronotopic flexibility propounded by Bakhtin enables Ghosh to move easily in the spatio-temporal realm. The narration is non-linear as there are digressions and diversions. The narrator draws heavily from the oral narratives to which he had listened during his childhood days and during the stage of growing up. Memories come to his aid so as to enable him to relive in
the past and relate it to the future. His uncle Tridib, the master story-teller, has given him ‘worlds to travel in and eyes to see them with’. The untimely death of Tridib raises many doubts in him. In his attempt to trace out the events that lead to his uncle’s death, he elicits reports from different narrators. From the ‘multiple voices of multiple narrators’ he chances upon the final redemptive mystery of Tridib’s death. It is from his father, his uncle Robi and Tridib’s lover May Price that the narrator tries to deduce the mystery behind Tridib’s death. The first time when he heard the excruciatingly painful news was from his father. When the narrator was only a child, his father took him to the temple of Ma Kali and revealed the secret to him after eliciting a promise from him to keep the matter a secret. Why it should be kept a secret perturbed the narrator. He could recognise the true intensity of the event only after fifteen years, from two narrators, one, Tridib’s brother Robi and the other Tridib’s lover May Price.

The terrible scene of Tridib’s death left a lasting imprint on Robi’s mind. The memory of it was so agonising that in the beginning his sleep was disturbed by dreams. He was not able to recreate and narrate the situation without fictionalising it. The rickshaw in which his granduncle Jethamoshai travelled appeared in his dreams like a gigantic ant-hill and its sides were seething with hundreds of men. Robi made a desperate attempt to prevent
Tridib from following May Price in her attempt to save Jethamoshai from the rioters. But all efforts proved futile and the place was strewn with the dead bodies of Tridib, Khalil and Jethamoshai. May Price, while narrating the way in which Tridib got killed which she had witnessed fifteen years back, still appears guilt-stricken and she thinks that she owes her life to him. But gradually she gets rid of her guilt. “I know now I didn’t kill him, I couldn’t have, if I had wanted. He gave himself up; it was a sacrifice, though real sacrifice is a mystery” (SL: 252).

The narrator does not elicit information from just one source but relies on the narrative voices of those who are interrelated either through familial ties or through friendship. But he couldn’t arrive at a convincing conclusion about the mystery related to his uncle’s martyrdom. Though he ransacked the library to get the exact news, he was only disappointed to see how insignificant his uncle’s death was to the world. The news was given at the bottom of the page as ‘Twenty-nine killed in riots’. The media appeared indifferent in furnishing the exact details related to the sacrifice made by his uncle. The apprehension of the narrator that the martyrdom of Tridib will be wiped off from the memory of the people if it is not recorded in history compels him to write down their family chronicle and *The Shadow Lines* is the result.
In this alternative history all those who had played significant roles in his development towards maturity were given prominent places. The stories that Tridib narrates to the protagonist-cum-narrator are in the form of fragmented recollections. This explains why the novel appears non-linear. The fictional narrator whom Ghosh introduces in *The Shadow Lines* is an impartial historian who strives to present the aftermath of historical events on the lives of ordinary people. He seeks to his aid, memories, recollections and orally transmitted stories through the perspective of different narrators. As the narration is allowed to sieve through the perspective of multiple narrators, it is untainted by the superior ideology of the author.

In his novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* Ghosh makes use of polyphonic method of narration. Antar, Murugan, Urmila Roy and Sonali Das are the major narrators. The computer, Ava which Murugan uses to perform his *At home* job for the International Water Council at New York also provides most of the information necessary for the development of the novel and hence can be considered as one of the narrators. A difference can be noticed in the narrative style of *Ava* and other human narrators. While the language of the human narrators is marked by their own inflections and accents, the language of the computer is flat and uninflectional, typical of machine.
The plot of the novel spans more than a century. It begins in the twenty-first century and through flashback moves to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ghosh envisages a global fraternity in the novel by covering a vast geographical area- India, Egypt and New York. He moves easily in the spatio-temporal realm by making use of the Bakhtinian construct of chronotope. A non-linear form of narration is followed in the novel. The third person omniscient narration is avoided; on the contrary, the story sieves through the perspectives of different narrators. The character is not subordinated to the narrator but both of them are given equal importance.

In the beginning of the twenty-first century, Antar, a marginalised Egyptian computer clerk stumbles upon the ID card of L. Murugan on his computer screen. Murugan, his former colleague was reported to have disappeared from the Life Watch on August 20th, the Mosquito Day in 1995. Nobody knew what happened to him afterwards. Everyone considered his disappearance as an irreparable loss and later his death was referred to as a euphemism for suicide.

Antar, confident of his assumption that cyber technology might help him across to clarify his doubts related to the whereabouts of Murugan, decides to make the full use of cyber technology. Years back, when his friend
and colleague disappeared from the Life Watch Antar had fed into the computer a message: “Subject missing since August 21, 1995”, it said, “last seen Calcutta, India.” The flash of the ID card on the computer screen seemed to be an answer to this query. Antar darted over to Ava’s keyboard and fed the name of L.Murugan into it along with a search command. Within minutes the computer Ava unravelled on its screen whatever he was searching for.

The information that Antar gathers from his supercomputer, constitutes a major part of the novel. The web, the cultural symbol of the technologically advancing modern world becomes the global connector and enables Antar to trace Murugan right from the time he started his research and follow him closely through every labyrinth of Calcutta. The data that Murugan has collected in the course of his research are fed into the computer in the form of newspaper clippings, letters and notices. A substantial contribution for proving Murugan’s hypothesis has been provided by Ava.

Ava assumes the role of the narrator of Farley’s story. Farley’s early life, the background of his research, his confrontation with the counter science team etc. are fed into the computer by Murugan and Ava unravels the same to Antar. The services rendered by the Simultaneous Visualization Headgear are unique. Antar can see Murugan on its screen and hear his narration.
Murugan’s contention is that Ronald Ross bagged the Nobel Prize for his discovery of the malarial parasite not because of his innate abilities and intuitive observation as a scientist, illiterate Indian assistants were in the background helping him to move the discovery towards the directions they wanted. Murugan came to know about this in the course of his research from a letter Elijah Farley, the American missionary doctor wrote to Eugene Opie, his colleague. Eugene Opie’s letter to Farley was an inspiration for him to research upon Dr. Alphonso Laveran’s theory of malaria research. Farley decided to do his experiments pertaining to the research from Dr.D.D Cunningham’s laboratory in Calcutta.

From Antar’s computer cabin at New York in the 21st century, Ghosh, through flashback moves to the 20th century to make Antar recollect his meeting with his colleague Murugan at the Thai Restaurant. He moves further back to the 19th century to furnish the details of a very important letter Dr. Farley wrote to Dr.Eugene Opie. The narration becomes non-linear and chronotopic by the easy to and fro movement in space and time.

Inserting diverse genres within a text is a common practice of postcolonial writers. From the letter written by Dr. Farley, Murugan learns that some bizarre events were taking place in Dr.Cunningham’s laboratory.
Though Dr. Cunningham accords warm welcome to Farley, he feels uneasy in the laboratory to see a saree-clad sweeper-woman and a young bearer boy observing him minutely and silently. To emphasise the fact that they are insignificant and downtrodden slum dwellers, Ghosh doesn’t furnish us with their names at first. Farley learned from Dr. Cunningham that the sweeper woman was Mangala from Sealdah. At Renupur Railway station in Sealdah one could see people who look for a job and a shelter. She was one such lady. Lutchman, her assistant was brought by her from the same place. He was a dhooley-bearer under the British Government appointed to shovel shit.

As Dr. Cunningham had to take leave to go to Assam, he entrusted his assistant Lutchman to provide Dr. Farley with all the facilities needed for the experiment, like slides and other equipment. Farley could sense that in the absence of Dr. Cunningham, some weird and secret rituals and chantings were taking place in an outhouse near the laboratory. He secretly noticed a great deal of activity taking place in a nearby anteroom too. Headed by Mangala, as though enthroned were some dozen people in various attitudes of supplication clustered around her feet. Two or three of them were in the last stage of syphilis. By her side were several bamboo cages containing pigeons shivering evidently near death. He saw that the bearer-boy, with an adept hand is taking clean slides to the anteroom whispering something in Mangala`s ears. At this
Mangala muttered a prayer, took a scalpel and beheaded the dying pigeon. Then she smeared the slides across the severed neck and handed them to the assistant. He gave the slides to Farley and asked him to examine them and said, “May be you will at last achieve success in your quest” (CC: 128).

The words were prophetic. Farley was able to see through the microscope movement of the amoeboid forms undulating slowly across the glassy surface. He saw hundreds of Laveran’s rods, tiny cylindrical things with their pointed penetrating heads piercing the bloody miasma. Laveran’s theory was proved beyond doubt. Farley’s excitement knew no bounds. He saw a row of faces watching him curiously and Mangala staring at him smiling to herself. “Tell him, the woman said with a mocking smile; tell him that what he sees is the creature’s member entering the body of its mate” (CC: 128).

Though the discovery was made, Mangala and Lutchman were not ready to allow him to go to the world with their rare secret knowledge. Somehow or other he should be finished off. So Lutchman in a cunning way takes him to the Renupur railway station, where in mysterious circumstances Farley disappears into oblivion.
Before his disappearance, Farley recorded the events he witnessed at the Cunningham`s laboratory in a letter to Eugene Opie, which Murugan searches out from a library during his research. But when he went to the library to have a second reading of the letter it had mysteriously disappeared. The information that Murugan gives to Urmila, his narratee is a reconstruction of the letter from his own memory. As these details were fed into the computer, Antar could access them through Ava. In the midst of providing information, the computer produces a beeping sound, showing on its screen-“Rest indecipherable, unable to continue…” (CC, 129). The information on the computer screen is given in the typical computer terminology with its flat, uninflectional sentences. Apart from human narrators, computer too does the work of the narrator, which remains unique in Ghosh’s polyphonic novels.

Urmila, another important narrator of the novel, whom Murugan met by mere coincidence during his fieldwork in Calcutta was able to provide Murugan with many relevant details to connect the missing links in his research. When Murugan revealed to Urmila that the name of the mysterious boy known as Lutchman, who played a prominent role in the counter science movement was also known by the name Lakhan, many of the earlier stories that she had heard came to her memory. She had special interest in Lakhan
because she wanted to write an article on Phulboni’s ‘Lakhan Stories.’ While Urmila was searching for more details, her friend and colleague Sonali Das narrated to her the experience of the famous writer Phulboni at Renupur railway station which was believed to be a haunted place and how the ghost of Lakhan mysteriously controlled him. The terrible and chilling experience of Phulboni at the railway station forms the crux of the story. Urmila narrated this story to Murugan hoping that it might help him in his research. Sonali, who narrated the story to Urmila had got it from her mother through oral narration. Her mother was the mistress of Phulboni, the writer, and once in a bout of drunkenness he related the story to his mistress and thus broke the rule of the counter science movement. Secrecy was the religion of counter science and the punishment for those who break the rule would be nothing less than death. The *Puranic* mode of story telling and the oral narrative methods are used by Ghosh to make the novel a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices.

Apart from this main story line, many other narrative strands are woven into the body of the novel. Phulboni’s chilling experience at the Renupur railway station and his Lakhan stories, Urmila’s life as a working woman and the role allotted to her in the counter science movement, Murugan’s dauntless quest for truth, Sonali, the film actress and her unfulfilled love affair with Romen Halder are some of the pivots around which the narratives are woven.
Mrs. Aratounian as the reincarnated Mangala, Romen Halder as the reborn Lakhan; the trio of Murugan, Urmila and Sonali; again the trio of Antar, Tara and Maria are all independent characters in the novel but they are interconnected chromosomally and knowledge is transmitted from one person to the other through interpersonal transference or transmigration of soul.

The impact of colonialism on the cultural, social and political lives of the once colonised countries is examined through the carefully observant eyes of Amitav Ghosh, from the vantage point of a marginalised Indian through the novel *The Glass Palace*. Ghosh is trying to look into the past when Burma was annexed and made into a province of British India. The animosity that Ghosh harboured within him towards the British colonisers is expressed throughout the novel. Amitav Ghosh withdrew *The Glass Palace* from the competition for Commonwealth Literature Prize. He justifies his action in his letter to the Prize Committee and asserts:

> The issue of how past is to be remembered lies at the heart of *The Glass Palace* and I feel that I would be betraying the spirit of my book if I were to allow it to be incorporated within that particular memorialisation of Empire that passes under rubric of “the Commonwealth” (Gupta, 2002: 242-243).
The claim of the West that their mission in colonising Eastern countries is to civilize them is interrogated by Ghosh. He wants to bring to light the stark realities of the past, right from the beginning of colonial domination. The historical events that took place in various colonial localities are analysed in this novel through his insightful observation.

In *The Glass Palace* Raj Kumar’s granddaughter Jaya’s son is the main narrator of the story and he interlinks many sub-narratives with different characters to make it a complete whole. The childhood memory of the fascinating, perplexing and the most tender sight that he has ever witnessed in his life, of the interlocked dentures of his great aunt Uma and his great grandfather Rajkumar in Uma’s bed persisted in his memory for a long time. While he grew up into maturity, his intense longing to know more about the nature of the relationship between Uma, ‘a benevolent benefactress’ (GP: 545) and his great grand father Rajkumar ‘a near destitute refugee’ (GP: 545) augmented in him. Hence he takes the decision to trace out the history of their family and write down their chronicle in the form of a novel. The novel thus written encompasses the great historical events beginning with the British annexation of Burma to the British India in November 1885 till the Burmese struggle for democracy under the leadership of their pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi and the attempts of the Military Junta to suppress the struggle by
keeping Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest in 1996. The records of these historical events are intertwined with struggle for survival of human beings caught up in the vortex of these great events. The family chronicle of the Rahas with Rajkumar at its head and the history of three generations of his family are foregrounded in The Glass Palace. The narrator was able to understand that Rajkumar’s struggle with life began as an orphan. When he was only eleven years old he came off from Chittagong with his mother to escape from a killer fever. But on the way he lost his mother, his only hope and pillar of his life. Having lost his father and his brothers even earlier, Rajkumar’s orphanhood became complete with the death of his mother. Her parting words, “Stay alive, Beche Thako. Rajkumar, live my Prince hold on to your life” (GP: 14) inspired him to move on with confidence. The ascent of Rajkumar from the ‘rag-clad kala’ to the heights of glory and his total pauperisation during the last stages of his life forms the core of the novel. Many other narratives are intricately interwoven into the texture of the novel making use of innovative narrative techniques like polyphony and heteroglossia. The excessive freedom allowed to characters makes it a polyphonic novel. The variety of linguistic registers that the characters use in the novel allows heteroglossia to occupy a prominent role. The language that Rajkumar uses during his childhood days of orphanhood is quite different
from the utterances of adult Rajkumar. He showed great maturity when he was
only a child of eleven and he approached a half-Indian and half-Bumese
food-stall owner for a job. Though annoyed at first, Ma Cho was good at
heart.

Who are your parents? Asked Ma Cho.

‘I don’t have any. They died.’ Said Rajkumar.

His short and pithy answer was capable of rousing sympathy in Ma Cho and
he agreed to work in her food stall for food and shelter. Gradually ties
between them strengthened and Rajkumar was able to elicit many interesting
details about the Glass Palace of Burma from her. In the midst of their
conversation Ma Cho would tell Rajkumar: ‘Now you get back to work or I’ll
fry your black face in hot oil…’ (G P: 10) It is Ma cho who wields power and
her utterances reflect the tendency of the powerful to control their
subordinates. Her words are illustrative of the dominance over her interlocutor
– Rajkumar, and he is willing to be subsumed as he has no other way open
before him. Her language is typical of the working class culture.

Emboldened by poverty and orphanhood, he adapts himself to the
changed situation and becomes an efficient teak trader. A comprador to the
West, he engages himself in transporting indentured labourers to work in the plantations. Being a sub-contractor in teak trade he emulated the coloniser in logging incessantly from teak forests and utilised elephants for pulling logs. Ecological degradation due to excessive exploitation of nature is underscored by Ghosh when he refers to the deceptive ways in which Rajkumar made money through deforestation. Ashcroft et al. observe:

> Ecological imperialism radically altered the entire ecology of the invaded lands in ways that necessarily disadvantaged indigenous people and annihilated or endangered the native fauna and flora on which their cultures and their very lives depended (Ashcroft et al 1998:76).

During the initial stages of his stay in the British occupied Burma Rajkumar wanted to offer resistance to the Empire but soon he finds it curbed under the apprenticeship of the opportunist and business man Saya John and he learns the tactics of survival in the colonised space. A displaced and alienated human being has no other choice but to adapt himself to the changed situation. Like Saya John, his benefactor, he too becomes a mimic man, dresses like a Saheb and begins speaking the coloniser’s language which makes him appear like ‘a reinvented being’. The grown up Rajkumar, at the
height of his prosperity reaches Ratnagiri, where the Burmese royal family was deported, to propose to the most beautiful girl that he had ever seen in his life – Miss. Dolly Sein, the ten year old palace attendant whom he had met twenty years ago.

The actual scene of the deportation of the royal family is poignantly etched in the novel through the perspective of the child Rajkumar. The readers are transported to the place where the crucial scene was enacted and are allowed to witness the real situation. The greed with which the Burmese crowd grabs the precious things from that unguarded Palace highlights the innate human selfishness to possess valuable things for themselves, disregarding the grievous condition of their country when it slipped off into the hands of the British government:

Everywhere people were intently at work, men and women, armed with axes and das; they were hacking at gem-studded Ook offering boxes; digging patterned gemstones from the marble floor; using fish-hooks to pry the ivory inlays from the sadaik chests (GP 33).

Amitav Ghosh, by presenting this kind of a symbolic action is trying to set the tone of the novel. As Elleke Boehmer argues, “the main intention of the colonisers was to exploit the natural resources and govern the indigenous
inhabitants of colonised land” (Boehmer as qtd. in McLeod 2000:8). Colonialism was a lucrative commercial operation bringing wealth and riches to the Western nations through the economic exploitation of the colonised countries. It was with this motivating force that Burma was annexed and made into a province of British India.

An officer holding his sheathed sword in front of him is seen ordering the Queen to leave the cabin, to go down the stairs into the palace. The powerful/powerless binary is seen in the relationship between the Queen of Burma and the Burmese mob. Before the British annexation, the doors of the Burmese palace were shut off from the public; they had no right to enter the palace to redress their grievances. But from the pedestal of glory the fall of the Burmese royal family is so sudden that the Queen cannot control herself:

‘Are we prisoners then? ’The queen’s face was twisted with fury. ‘Who has sent you here?’

‘Our orders came from Taingda Mingyi,’ the officer said.

‘For your safety Mebya.’

‘Our safety?’ (GP:23)

But the Burmese Queen cannot be safe when the whole country has become unsafe in the hands of the Empire. The British imperialists did not waste any
time in removing the royal family from their glorious position and laying siege to the palace of Mandalay. The Indian soldiers ‘obediently’ served the British in the annexation: The guard-post was full of soldiers and they were herding the girls towards the steps:

Dolly glanced down: the flight of stairs was very steep. Her head began to spin.

‘I can’t,’ she cried. ‘I can’t’.

The fictional narrator comments upon the situation:

‘She would fall she knew it. The princess was too heavy for her; the stairs were too high; she would need a free hand to keep her balance’ (GP: 23).

A soldier was prodding her with the cold hilt of his sword compelling her to move quickly. The callousness of the Indian soldiers working in the British army is highlighted here. The eventful day was memorable for Rajkumar, a kalaat from across the sea (GP 1) as he met the palace attendant Dolly on that day:

‘What is your name?’ Rajkumar said.

She whispered a couple of inaudible syllables.

‘Doh-lee?’

‘Dolly.’
'Dolly,' repeated Rajkumar. ‘Dolly’. (GP:35)

Afterwards her face didn’t fade from his mind. The above cited instance, when sieved through the perspective of Rajkumar when he was only a child, follows the style and register of a child. But when he recounts the same event during his adulthood the cadence and register undergo considerable change. What we hear is the matured voice of Rajkumar, the colonised mimic man. Confidence and clarity mark his style of speech. The way he handles English language reveals the degree of progress he has made in communicating his ideas in the language of the coloniser. The Collector at Ratnagiri, Rajkumar’s narratee is so awestruck by the gentlemanly qualities visible in him that he addresses him as Mr. Raha. Homi Bhabha has described mimicry as the desire for a reformed recognisable other, ‘as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite’ (Bhabha 1994:89). Here Raha resembles the ‘mimic’ man visualised by Bhabha. His complicity with the coloniser is conspicuous here. He responds to the questions of the Collector in polished English:

‘Burma’, Mr. Raha, he said in his ironical way. ‘You have told us very little about it. What took you there in the first place?’

‘Accident’, Rajkumar said shortly.
‘What kind of accident carries a man to another country?’

‘I was working on a boat and found myself stranded in Mandalay. This was at the start of British invasion. The river was closed to traffic.’

‘An eventful time’

‘A strange time, sir.’ (GP:142)

In the dialogue cited above no word seems to be superfluous, only compact utterances befitting the situation. The metamorphosis of Rajkumar, from the rag-clad kalaa into a colonised mimic man has been vividly portrayed through the dialogue.

In describing the unparalleled beauty of Dolly, Ghosh resorts to polyphony. Her beauty, when reflected through ‘multiple voices’ becomes all the more enchanting. In Rajkumar’s version, she appeared to be beautiful beyond belief, beyond comprehension. “She was like the palace itself, a thing of glass, inside which you could see everything your imagination was capable” (GP: 144). The Collector’s wife, when she saw Dolly for the first time felt that “Mss Sein was perhaps the loveliest woman she’d ever set her eyes on” (GP: 108). The same view has been reiterated when the working class woman with whom Rajkumar had an illicit relationship saw the
photograph. She said to Rajkumar, “She’s so beautiful, like a princess—what do you want to do with a woman like me?” (GP: 236). Enforcement of an idea through multiple voices is a strategy that Ghosh successfully makes use of in his novels.

Ghosh makes the novel *The Hungry Tide* naturally unfold through the perspective of different characters-cum-narrators like Kanai, Piya, Nirmal, Nilima, Kusum, Fokir, Moyna and Horen. Minor narrators are introduced here and there to serve relevant details. An unnamed fictional narrator functions like a commentator and interconnects the missing links in the novel. The number of characters introduced in *The Hungry Tide* is less when compared to the other novels of Ghosh. The spatio-temporal realm is also limited. The major geographical area depicted in this novel is primarily confined to the Sundarbans, though passing references have been made to places like America and Calcutta. Past, present and future mix up in the narration.

The structure of the novel deviates from the traditional monologic methods of narration with a single authorial voice by allowing the narrative to sieve through the perspective of different narrators. Ghosh projects different ideologies through the mouth of these narrators. Through Kanai Dutt he warns us of the susceptibility of the Bay of Bengal to violent storms. His fear of the
extinction of endangered aquatic and land animals, the threat that fauna and flora face today and the impending ecological disaster are revealed through the scientist Piyali Roy. Ghosh’s concern for the dispossessed and disinherited subaltern settlers in the Morichjhapi Islands is expressed through the fictional characters like Nirmal and Kusum. Kusum’s narration to Nirmal and Horen reveals the callous and indifferent manner in which the subalterns are oppressed by the rich bourgeois. The subaltern women are doubly oppressed, first, by patriarchy and the other by the bureaucrats. She cites the instance of how her mother was drawn to prostitution deceptively by Dilip. Her plight would have been the same, but for the timely rescue made by Horen.

In his portrayal of the ruthless suppression of the Morichjhapi rebellion by the Bengal government, Ghosh lashes his tongue against the bureaucracy which is least bothered about the welfare and well-being of the suffering subaltern settlers of the tide country. Ghosh wants his works to be a record of the contemporary world for the benefit of the future generation of readers. The global problems and challenges are studied and presented in a fictionalised form through polyphony.

The marginalised subalterns of India are given due recognition in the fictional works of Ghosh. The depiction of silent, tactful and intuitive
operations carried out by Mangala and Lakhan in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is reminiscent of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s representation of the muteness and suicide of a female insurgent, Bhubaneswari Bhaduri in her ground-breaking essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ But the Bengali intellectuals re-coded her patriotic and courageous action of suicide and her participation in the anti-colonial insurgency as an act of illicit love. By delineating subalterns in such a context, Spivak underscores the fact that the subalterns cannot speak because their words cannot be properly interpreted. When the subalterns suffering from acute syphilitic paresis gathered round Mangala in supplication to get a miraculous cure from the deadly disease, the conscience of Dr. Farley, the representative of the Western intellectual elite wanted to “call out and tell them not to waste time on whatever quackery it was that this woman offered; to expose the falsehood that she and her minions had concocted to deceive simple people” (CC: 126). The conviction that the subalterns are ignorant, illiterate and superstitious is at the apex of Western consciousness. Their ability to provide medical cure to a deadly and terrible disease is beyond his imagination. But Dr. Farley is proved wrong when he witnessed the success in their experiment to find out the malaria parasite. Yet another more important discovery made by them is that malaria, the deadly disease, in its turn is a cure
for syphilitic dementia, which shows that they are far more advanced in their intuitive knowledge than their Western counterparts.

The situation that Ghosh presents in *The Hungry Tide*, when the refugee settlers of Morichjhapi in the Sundarbans revolted against the oppressive policies of Bengal government, has similar overtones. Kusum, a silent revolutionary expresses her pent up hatred against the Bengal government and the police force recruited by them for evicting the settlers of the island for the sake of animals. Her righteous indignation towards bureaucracy is revealed through her words, “Who are these people,” I wondered, “who love the animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them?” (HT: 262). The sacrifice made by the refugee settlers including Kusum by their voluntary acceptance of death went unnoticed in the annals of history, as they remained mute and silent. Ghosh, by citing such instances endorses Spivak’s view that the subaltern cannot speak (Spivak, 2003:338).

Travelogues written by Amitav Ghosh are no exceptions in using the polyphonic mode of narration. Unlike the monologic mode of narration followed in conventional travelogues of well-known travel writers like Marco Polo, Ibn Bhattuta, Fa-hien, and Hieuen-t-Sang, Ghosh adopts polyphony and non-linear form of narration in his travelogues. By journeying into the
country concerned, he imbibes its history, culture and tradition and studies the
problems that the people of the country have encountered by conducting
interviews and friendly chats with them. These dialogues are presented in the
travelogues through the mouth of those who have originally experienced the
situation. Thus multiple experiences are projected through multiple voices.
Arran E. Gare observes:

A polyphonic grand narrative in the form of a dialogic discourse
could take into account the diversities of cultures and
multiplicity of local stories by which humanity has formed and
is forming itself… (Gare: 1995, 140).

Dialogic rather than monologic grand narratives enable the achievements of
all communities, societies and civilizations of the world to be appreciated.
Gare argues:

The conceiving of narratives in this way would avoid the
tendency noted by post-structuralists of reducing people
differentiated from protagonists of a story to the ‘other’. For
instance, it would avoid the tendency of history to focus on the
rise of Western civilization and to deny a story to societies
subjugated by it (Gare: 1995, 143).
The narrative content of the travelogue *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma* is filtered through the perspective of different narrators who had undergone the severe experiences of the period which is under the observation of the writer. To enable his research, Ghosh establishes friendship with the common, ordinary people of the country as well as with the eminent political figures, diplomats, administrators and other acclaimed personalities.

Chea Samy, the renowned dancer who got herself trained from the Cambodian palace, Molyka, the civil servant who accompanied Ghosh as the interpreter when he went to interview Chea Samy, Sros, a commoner who had undergone the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge Regime, Loth Seiri- the brother of PolPot, Khieu Seng Kim, the brother of Khieu Sampan, an American Quaker relief worker and a Catholic relief worker from Italy are some of the persons whom Ghosh interviews and they play a pivotal role in the development of the first story- *Dancing in Cambodia*.

The Pol Pot regime closed the door of the country to the rest of the world. Nearly two million people were killed. The horrors of PolPot regime was so intense that people longingly looked forward to an aggression by an external power to terminate the horrible condition which prevailed there. Vietnamese invasion of 1979 was a welcome relief to them.
After the collapse of the Khmer Rouge Regime, the evacuees started coming back to their own village and slowly began to rediscover the exhilaration of speech. So far they had not been able to say a word to anyone with confidence; not even their own children. Many of them reinvented their lives to protect themselves from Angkor’s Cadres. Gradually they began to shed their assumed personae and started to mine their memories for information about people they once knew. Chea Samy and a handful of other dancers left alive after the Khmer Rouge Regime began to revive the traditional classical Khmer dancing. In 1988, when the Cambodian music and dance were performed for the first time after the revolution, people from all over the country, dancers and choreographers flocked to the theatre. When they met for the first time after the revolution, they would shout with joy, “you are still alive” and then they would cry thinking of some one who had died” (DCAB: 51). An Italian relief worker in Cambodia was really astonished at the response. Even when the city was in shambles, with debris everywhere and even when they had no food and money, they could think of music and dance. The event reveals how the artistic heritage and cultural tradition functioned as a source of strength to the people of Cambodia during moments of crisis. Cultural symbols like art and music helped the people of Cambodia to retain their identity.
The polyphony of the alien relief workers imparts originality to the travelogue. Eva Mysliwiec, an American Quaker relief worker who was present at the performance heard sobs all around her. When the first musician came on stage and when the dancers arrived, every one was crying. People said, “We thought everything was lost, that we would never hear our music again, never see our dance” (DCAB: 52). It was a kind of rebirth. The event points to the indestructibility of art and the capacity of the middle class to preserve its forms of knowledge and expression through the most extreme kinds of adversity.

The central symbol of the second chapter of the travelogue – *Stories in Stones* is the Angkor Wat temple. The setting of Angkor Wat is Mt. Meru- the sacred mountain of the ancient Indian myths. The fact that South East Asian countries had a superior culture in the past is highlighted through this story. Amitav Ghosh, an Indian born researcher and an avid traveller was really amazed to see almost all the deities whom the Hindus of India worship, on the bas-reliefs of Angkor Wat. The co-existence of Hindu and Buddhist religious symbols in the same compound of the Angkor Wat speaks volumes about the communal amity that prevailed in ancient Cambodia. Ghosh by highlighting such an instance advocates religious harmony that is the dire need of the day. But the temple, the one time symbol of Cambodian culture, is now in ruins.
Ghosh makes use of the information that he gathered from personal contacts and interviews to throw light into the past glory of Cambodian kingdom and its present condition. Ven. Luong Chun, a Buddhist monk and Kong Sarith, a Cambodian conservative worker are the persons who share their knowledge and experience with Amitav Ghosh. A kind of novelty and uniqueness is thus imparted to his travelogue by adopting this kind of narration. Through the Polyphony of the narrators Ghosh presents before the readers the lost glory and culture of Cambodia.

It is from the dialogue between the author and the narrators that the story develops into a full-fledged travelogue. Ven Luong Chun is revealed as a pious Buddhist monk who has great faith in Buddhist religion and adoration towards the Angkor Wat temple. Kong Sarith emerges as a brave youth capable of withstanding the terrible effects of Khmer Rouge Regime. By reporting the gist of the dialogue between Kong Sarith and the archeologist, Ghosh underscores the fact that terrorist regime cannot easily destroy innate abilities and inborn talents.

The third story in this travelogue, *At Large in Burma* reveals Ghosh in a mood of nostalgia. His parents and relatives lived in Burma and he grew up listening to the stories about Burma. Though Burma is India’s closest
neighbour, news about Burma rarely appears in Indian newspapers. Ghosh devotes the last story of this book to give due attention to this marginalised land. Burma attained independence in 1948, but the civil war which broke out in its wake destroyed the peace of the land. Ghosh focuses his attention on the social, political and historical development of the postcolonial Burma. He tries to trace the reasons for the painful transformation of Burma from the prosperous ‘golden land’ (DCAB 67) to one of the most impoverished countries in the world.

Ghosh’s attempt to delve deep into the socio-political crisis in Burma leads him to establish associations with those who can supply him with first-hand information relating to the contemporary situation. He conducts friendly chats and interviews with many important personalities of the period. Verbatim quotation of dialogues, reports of the gist of the dialogue, author’s own remarks and comments together are woven into a polyphonic narrative. Thus the travelogue becomes a ‘site for the dialogic interaction of multiple voices’ (Abrams, 2001: 62). A cross-section of the informants from whom Ghosh has elicited the details required to highlight the current literary scenario of Burma reveals that they vary from laymen to highly placed dignitaries. Aung San Suu Kyi, who is the hope and pillar of the people of Burma, was one among them. A writer, who had lived through the dark ages of the Junta
Regime; Abel Tweed, the Foreign Minister of the Karennis National Progressive Party; Ko Sonny the commander of the Regiment of the young Guerrilla group; the Prime Minister of the Karennis, the Second in Command of the Karennis, Ma Thanegi, an artist friend who became an active member of the democratic movement are some others who provided necessary information.

After Suu Kyi’s house arrest, Ghosh asked her some purely personal questions. He asked her how she felt when she was under house arrest to which Suu Kyi said, “Sometimes I thought it would be better in prison”

‘Did Buddhism help?’ I asked

‘Yes’, she said, ‘Buddhist meditation helped because it created a sense of awareness and a sense of calm.’ (DCAB: 82)

She added that nothing had happened to her relationship with her family, but she appeared to be unwilling to talk about her family to a stranger. Ghosh too felt; “It is wrong as well as unseemly to reduce a vast political movement to the career of a single leader--to identify the aspirations of millions of people with the life of an individual” (DCAB: 83). As opposed to the traditional monologic narratives in which the author assumes an omniscient position, polyphonic narratives accommodate the utterances of all the characters giving them an equal status of that of the narrator.
Contradictory viewpoints, expressed through multiple voices form the characteristic feature of polyphonic novels. Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* observes:

Dostoevsky’s work has been broken down into a series of contradictory philosophical stances, each defended by one or other character. Among these also figure, but far from the first place, the philosophical view of the author himself (Bakhtin, 1984:5).

Freedom of characters is paramount in polyphonic novels and they are free to express their ideologies. The polyphonic narrative method that Ghosh uses in his novels enables him to foreground the contradictions that prevail in the society.

Piyali Roy, one of the protagonists of *The Hungry Tide*, a supporter of deep ecology is engaged in her research work on the endangered marine mammals. She was awestruck to see the horrifying cruelty shown by human beings towards a ferocious but mute animal, tiger, when it strayed into human habitat. The villagers blinded it by piercing a sharpened bamboo pole into its eyes and burned it alive. Kanai justified the action of the village mob and said,
'Piya you have to understand -- that the animal’s been preying on this village for years. It has killed two people and any number of cows and goats.

‘This is an animal, Kanai,’ Piya said, ‘You can’t take revenge on an animal’ (HT: 294).

Fokir too shared Kanai’s view and said, ‘When a tiger comes in a human settlement, it’s because it wants to die’ (HT: 295).

To express disparate and contradictory philosophical stances, the author introduces the voices of different characters like Kanai, Piya and Fokir. Piya being a deep ecologist holds aloft her ideology of protecting the animals at any cost, while Kanai and Fokir are presented as practical men who will not hesitate to kill an animal if it encroaches upon the human habitat. Just like the village mob, both Kanai and Fokir are more anthropocentric and hold the view that the sustenance of human life is of prime importance. To them, if an animal disrupts the existence of human beings or poses a threat to their safe living it must be killed at any cost.

There is an apparent contradiction in the attitudes of people towards the refugee settlers of the Sundarban Islands. While the intrusion of the Scotsman named Daniel Hamilton into one of the Sundarban Islands named Lusibari was considered a part of the civilizing mission, the settlement of the subaltern
refugees in Morichjhapi Island was resisted tooth and nail by the Bengal government as it has been identified as a Tiger Reserve, strictly prohibiting human habitation. While Nilima is depicted as a supporter of the Bengal government and works for the welfare of the Lusibari settlers, her husband Nirmal is portrayed as one who feels empathy towards the suffering subalterns of Morichjhapi. Nirmal visits the Island without the consent of his wife to express his solidarity with the Morichjhapi rebellion and thereby creates a rift in their family by disagreeing with her ideals and principles.

In *The Glass Palace* conflicting ideologies are presented through the portrayal of the Collector and his wife. The Collector, Beniprasad Dey and his wife Uma Dey represent the educated Indian elite during the period of colonisation. While Uma protests against the British colonial aggression and becomes the spearhead of Indian National Movement to struggle for the liberation of India, her husband collaborates with the coloniser in subjugating the colonised. When the exiled royal family of Burma is brought under his supervision, he can do something to improve their lot, but he chooses to be a faithful servant of the Empire. Finally for a minor negligence of his duty to the Empire, he is summarily dismissed from the post of the Collector. The only way left for the grief-stricken Collector is to commit suicide.
Ghosh’s portrayal of grandmother and her uncle Jethamoshai in *The Shadow Lines* exposes how they are at loggerheads in their ideologies, though they belong to the same lineage. By highlighting the extreme nationalistic feelings of the grandmother, Ghosh tries to express his antagonism towards the two-nation theory and emphasises the need for a borderless world where everyone treats others as fellow-human beings; where cast, creed and colour are no barrier for mental unity. Quite contrary to the grandmother’s principles, her uncle, Jethamoshai living peacefully with the Muslim refugees in his own home as one among them, doesn’t believe in borders. The boundary line that separates Dhaka and Calcutta is insignificant to him. He is not ready to accompany his kith and kin to India and in defiance he says:

I don’t believe in this India Shindia. It’s all very well, you are going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? (SL:215)

The instances cited from different novels of Ghosh show how the polyphony allows him to give freedom to each character to express his or her ideologies.

Inconclusiveness, unfinalisability and open-endedness are features of polyphonic novels. In Bakhtin’s perspective, it is not possible to say ‘the last
word’ about anything in human sphere, whatever may be the case in the physical sciences, and he venerated Dostoevsky for founding his art of fiction upon this principle; at the end of Dostoevsky’s novels, says Bakhtin:

> Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not been spoken, the world is open and free, and everything is still in the future and always will be in the future (Bakhtin, 1984:166).

Following Bakhtin’s lead, Ghosh through his novels gives resistance to hierarchy and closure and opts for open-endedness and unfinalisability, the characteristic features of polyphonic novels. Like Dostoevsky, Ghosh leaves his ideological tensions unresolved leaving many loopholes for the readers to interpret future in their own way. Thus, in the polyphonic method a prominent space is provided for the readers to interrogate and interpret the text.

>The Glass palace ends with a bizarre image of interlocked dentures, unforeseen so far by the readers and leaving them bewildered about future, indirectly hinting that peaceful coexistence may lead to happiness in life. The ending of The Hungry Tide leaves food for thought for curious minds. Piya decides to live the rest of her life with Nilima at the Sundarbans, sacrificing her whole life for the proposed project of protecting the endangered species of
marine mamals. Her vision of home is contrasted with that of Nilima’s view of an ideal home. To Piya home is where the Oracella are, and for Nilima home is wherever she can brew a pot of good tea. Kanai too had free time to spend with Nilima. What would be the outcome of such a life together? The readers are given ample choice as the novel remains open ended.

At the end of The Circle of Reason the major characters resume their travel again, disburdened of false dreams. Zindi and Alu head for home via Tangiers. Jyothi Das too goes with them upto Tangiers, where “migrating birds fill the sky as they make their annual flight between Europe and Africa, apt symbols of the universal tendency to leave behind continents of defeat and move forward to a world full of hope” (CR:423).Travel continues. Nothing is solved. Hopelessness, rootlessness and alienation remain as the burning problems of life.

The end of The Shadow Lines is even more perplexing. The Indian narrator is seen lying under the warm and comfortable embracing hold of the ‘English memsahib’ May Price, who narrates to him the final redemptive mystery of Tridib’s death. The ending suggests the futility of the two-nation theory and the absurdity of binary oppositions like centre/periphery and East/West. When people unite by means of warmth of love and friendship,
borderlines and boundaries become extinct. In this era of mass migration and the concept of global village, a strict configuration of demarcating lines in the man-made maps becomes meaningless. Ghosh’s appeal for universal brotherhood is epitomised here.

Towards the end of *The Calcutta Chromosome* Phulboni is seen rushing towards the railway station in the company of other members of the counter science team most probably to embrace death. Murugan-Urmila-Sonali trio and later Antar-Tara-Maria trio are to continue the mysterious task initiated by the counter science team through interpersonal transference of soul. A definite conclusion is not given and the novel remains open ended. Tying up the loose ends of the novel might sound artificial if the mission of the novel is to present an artistic representation of a realistic life, because nobody can fulfil all the desires in one’s life.

Generic hybridity is signalled in the novel by means inserted genres like letters, manuscripts in the form of journals and diaries and excerpts from poems, which is one of the characteristic features of polyphonic novels. Inclusion of these genres shows that “the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, between literature and non-literature are constantly changing as the novel is a developing genre” (Bakhtin, 1981: 33). The writing of letters often
helps the author both to narrate an event of the recent past and to trigger an event of the near future. In *The Hungry Tide*, the letter that Kanai wrote to Piya as a gift comprises a tide country legend--the story of Bon Bibi, the forest’s protectress. Some chapters of the novel are set apart in italics for presenting the journal/diary written down by Nirmal from the Morichjhapi Island during the last days of his life. It was dated May 15, 1979, and was directly addressed to Kanai in the form of some kind of an extended letter. In Bakhtinian dialogics every word is directed towards an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates. Kanai functions as the assumed listener of Nirmal’s diary in which he reveals the story of the Sundarban islands, its geography, origin, landscape, waterscape, skyscape and the story of human beings whose life is entwined with the ecology of the Sundarbans. The manuscript is interspersed with quotations from the poems of Rainer Maria Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* to substantiate the ideologies of Nirmal. The incorporated verses refract authorial intentions, as shown in the couplet quoted while writing about the evolution of Kusum into a dispossessed refugee settler of the Morichjhapi Island:

Each slow turn of the world carries such dispossessed

Ones to whom neither past nor future belong. (HT: 165).
This method of the inclusion of different genres in the novel very often helped Ghosh to defamiliarise the situation and to interweave past and present events. The letters exchanged between Uma and Dolly (GP: 188,190), the pornographic letter that Tridib wrote to his lover, May Price (SL: 137-144) and the letter that Dr. Farley wrote just before his death which provided important clues related to the counter-science movement (CC: 129) show the profuse use of inserted genre in the novels of Ghosh.

The conventional methods of writing appear inadequate to reflect the new experiences of the human mind and the new landscapes that modern age has created. Coherence, chronology and linearity, the watchwords of traditional fiction is replaced by incoherent, non-linear and fragmented narration. As writers resort more to memory for interconnecting past with the present, flashbacks and flash forwards become an inevitable part of modern narratives. To recover and retrieve the earlier days, writers revisit the past and interconnect it with the present. To fulfil all these, they require innovative techniques and inventive brains. Ghosh’s ingenuity in handling photography in his novels is a good case in point. The photographic realism that he uses in his novels helps him to re-live the past and to gather information relating to the photographed persons. The portrait of Queen Victoria in the Collector’s room reminds Dolly of the cruel and callous way in which the Queen
subjugated her subordinates. What Uma heard about the cruel killings undertaken at the behest of Queen Supayalath of Burma to enthrone her husband, Thebaw as the king of Burma was insignificant when compared to the cruel massacre of people during the reign of Queen Victoria (GP:114). In *The Shadow Lines* the narrator recollects the war-ravaged London of the 1930s with the help of the photograph. The photographs of Mrs. May Price’s brother Allan Tresawsen and his three brothers who were killed in the war, remind the narrator that the war didn’t spare the whites. In *The Hungry Tide*, Lucy Hamilton’s photograph at Nilima’s house in Lusibari takes us back to the period of colonialism when the white colonisers subjugated the people and exploited the rich natural resources of the colonised. Thus the photographs help Ghosh to link past and present; memory and reality.

The novels written during the postcolonial period cannot help reflecting the drastic changes effected in the society due to the advancement of science and technology. In *The Calcutta Chromosome* it is the unforeseen progress made in the cyber world that comes to the aid of Antar who is curious to know the whereabouts of his long lost colleague, Murugan. Not only did Antar earn his living by his computer Ava, but it could whet his curiosity relating his colleague Murugan whose ID flashed on the computer screen on an eventful day. The world that Ghosh presents in *The Hungry Tide* is quite different.
Unlike Murugan, the researcher, in The Calcutta Chromosome who looks backward in to the past history of Ronald Ross and his discovery and deduces truth from the past events, Piyali Roy, the researcher in The Hungry Tide looks forward to the future, worried more about the impending ecological disaster and the endangering of marine mammals. Science and technology come to her aid in the form of various devices like the hand-held monitor to keep track of the movement of dolphins through the Global Positioning System, a range-finder which tells the distance and depth-finder which provides an exact reading of the depth when its sensor is dipped beneath the surface. To understand the pulse of the public related to the protection of marine mammals, she exploits the possibilities of internet and sends e-mail messages. The positive replies that she gets from them inspire her to move forward with confidence and optimism to the task of protecting the vanishing dolphins.

Yet another noticeable feature of Ghosh’s novels is his experimentation with language. Ghosh, the globe trotter possesses an absorbing ear to imbibe varieties of languages and the use of them in his novels enriches them. NGugi Wa Thiongo has stressed the importance of language in society as follows:
The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people’s definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe (Ngugi, 1981: 4).

The significance of language in novels is underscored by Bakhtin in his essay, ‘Discourse in the Novel’ when he defines novel as ‘a diversity of speech types, sometimes even diversity of languages and a diversity of individual voices artistically organised. Heteroglossia which means ‘social diversity of speech types,’ is according to Bakhtin the indispensable prerequisite of the novel as a genre. It is the internal stratification of different registers within any single national language. Novelistic discourse is a profound intermixture of linguistic social registers, which is achieved in the novel by the creation of fictional characters. They contribute to the heteroglot variety of the novel by using a particular kind of language and by having a particular viewpoint on the world around them. Characters may use a different dialect, jargon or personal idiosyncrasy of utterance as most of Ghosh’s characters do adding to the variety of style which make up the novel’s style as a whole. Bakhtin argues:
The human being in the novel is first, foremost and always a speaking human being, the novel requires speaking persons bringing with them their own unique ideological discourse, their own language. The fundamental condition, that which is responsible for its stylistic uniqueness is the speaking person and his discourse (Bakhtin, 1981: 332).

A diverse group of literary characters with their own individual dialectical variations of language make their appearance in the novels of Amitav Ghosh, contributing thereby to their heterglot quality.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome* social heteroglossia is projected through the speeches of different characters who engage in dialogue with one another. Murugan, the researcher had a global childhood wandering between world’s capitals with his technocrat father. He graduated from Syracuse and taught for several years in a college in New York. His exposure to different kinds of ‘englishes’ during his global wanderings had influenced him in the development of his idiolect and the colloquial, conversational style of his speech. Though he is capable of speaking sophisticated English, most often he makes use of English slanguage, a harsh and abusive language in his dialogues. When, as a part of his research programme, Murugan reached his
native land, Calcutta he could see an emaciated gap-toothed boy wearing T-shirt following him. The boy interrupted Murugan:

    Mister; I find you; what you doing here? The boy was peering over the wall, his face right above Murugan’s head, laughing.

    Murugan lost his temper. ‘Get out of my sight you son of a bitch,’ he shouted (CC: 37).

Here we can see Murugan switching over to a typical Indian way of expressing indignation by addressing the boy as the son of a bitch. The strategy of code-switching employed by Murugan in this context emphasises his strong resentment and displeasure towards his addressee. The instance cited shows how the postcolonial writers, as a part of inscribing alterity and installing cultural distinctiveness resort to the technique of switching between two or more codes which is termed as code-switching in socio-linguistics. In their seminal work *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al., assert that postcolonial writers employ the highly developed strategy of code-switching and vernacular transcription which achieves the dual result of abrogating the Standard English and appropriating an English as a culturally significant discourse (Ashcroft et al., 1989: 45).
Antar, when he is entrusted with the task of dissuading Murugan from going to Calcutta for research, leaving his job at Life Watch in New York, gives him an e-mail message to come and meet him. The way Murugan greets Antar at the office and his colloquial style of speech are typical of a diasporic Indian showing the influence of American slang. Sometimes Antar finds it difficult to comprehend Murugan’s ideas. An instance from the novel may reveal this.

When it was time for lunch, Murugan said,

‘Come on, let’s go and grab a bite’

Grab-a-bite? Antar said, momentarily uncomprehending.

Murugan gave a hoot of laughter: Get some lunch, something to eat’ (CC: 42).

Here the sudden switching over to a colloquial style signals the friendly and jocular manner in which the speaker addresses his addressee. Ghosh’s sensitivity to decipher inflections and accent of an English speaking Calcutta bound man is also revealed through the method of code-switching.

In The Glass Palace the Burmese King Thebaw and the Queen Supayalath speak Hindustani with great ease and fluency. To express her displeasure against the representatives of the Government, the Queen prefers
to speak in Hindustani. She had found that her use of Hindustani usually put the government representatives at a disadvantage, especially, the Indians who were rarely fluent in Hindustani. The British civil servants often spoke Hindustani well, and those who did not were not hesitant in switching on to English. Thus code-switching and diglossia seems to be essential to survive in the colonised space. The way the Queen expresses her pent up anger against the British may serve an example. The newly appointed Collector at Ratnagiri, while defending the prowess of the British Empire, incurs Queen’s displeasure. Her anger finds an outlet when she says, “That’s enough, Mr. Collector, enough, bas karo.” Here, through an effortless mixing up of two national languages, Hindustani and English, the Queen expresses her discontent against the Collector in collaborating with the colonisers in subjugating the royal family. Later on, when the Collector is informed about the pregnancy of the First Princess, he realises that he has failed in his duty of protecting the royal blood. He could not control his feelings. He hurried into his gaari, calling impatiently to Kanhoji, ‘Chalo! Jaldi chalo, Jaldi, to the Residency quickly.’ Here it is seen that in emotionally charged situations, Hindustani, his mother tongue comes to him naturally.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome* Mrs. Aratounian’s English is slightly different from that of Murugan’s. She uses archaic English while watching a
television programme in which Phulboni; a well known writer was giving a speech, her talks to Murugan, expresses her annoyance and displeasure in listening to speeches:

‘Didn’t I warn you Mr. Morgan?’ She snapped. ‘And I’ll wager you tuppence to a groat he’ll go on absolutely forever’ (CC: 104).

Aratounian is supposed to be the reincarnation of Mangala through the transmigration of soul, just as Romen Halder is the reborn Lakhan. In the sacrifice scene, while raising the scalpel to split Romen Halder’s body into two, so that his soul can migrate to the body of the immediate heir through transmigration, she uses archaic rustic Bengali:

“The time is here, pray that all goes well for our Lakhan, once again” (CC: 140).

Urmila’s English is “literary and learned”, (Khair, 2003:158) of an educated lower middle class Indian family. She was working upon Phulboni, a wellknown writer and wanted to elicit details relating to him from her friend Sonali:
‘I’ve got to write an article about him,’ said Urmila. ‘And I’ve been wondering about a couple of things. Some one told me that you might be the right person to talk to’ (CC: 51).

*In The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh uses the expressions like ‘saar-ey,’ a typical Kerala dialect to refer to ‘sir’ and *Namaste* an Indian way of greeting each other (CC:386).

In *The Hungry Tide* the dialogue of characters in their social dialect is transferred as such into the novel without being appropriated into the private language system of the author. This method imparts originality to the events depicted and brings in different stylistic devices peculiar to their conversation; their colloquial language, idiomatic expressions, slang commonly used in his or her community and the educated language of the learned group. The social dialects thus retained in the novel give it an indigenous taste and local colour.

At Lusibari, when Kanai knocked at Nilima’s door, the voice that answered was uncharacteristically tremulous;

Ke?
‘It’s me – Kanai’

‘Come in, the door is open’, said Nilima.
Kanai saw that Nilima was not feeling well. He told her to take better care of her health.

‘Enough about me,’ she said, ‘Sit down and tell me how you have been faring’. ‘Did you sleep last night?’

‘Well enough’

‘And the packet?’ She cried eagerly. ‘Did you find it?’

‘Yes. It was exactly where you said it would be.’

‘So then, bal to re,’ tell me,’ said Nilima, ‘were they poems or stories?’

The extract quoted above shows how Nilima has imbibed the language of the tide country settlers and incorporates into her talk expressions like ke and bal to re.

Kanai, knows six languages and many dialects. He could judge a person’s nationality by his/her accent. A translator and interpreter by profession, his ears are tuned to the nuances of spoken language. When he meets Piyali Roy for the first time, he is able to guess from her accent that she is an American. Piya, feigning admiration asked him:

‘But how did you guess?’

About what?
About my being an American? You’re very observant.’

…I didn’t guess,’ he said.’ I knew’ (HT: 10).

Nilima’s Bengali language, after years of living in the tide country had almost converged with the local dialect, having been stripped of the inflections of her urban upbringing. Are, Esho, Righty-oh etc are expressions that very often come in her conversation. But her English had survived as a perfect specimen of a tongue learned in the school of the Raj. Sometimes code-switching is done to make the conversation unintelligible to a third person who may overhear it. For instance, in The Hungry Tide, Nilima switches on from Bengali to English so that Moyna, Fokir’s wife will not understand what they speak about her husband.

The postcolonial trend of mixing the language of the colonial power with the indigenous languages helped Ghosh to highlight the cultural distinctiveness peculiar to a country. The technique of selective lexical fidelity which leaves some words untranslated in the text has been used in postcolonial novels. To cite an instance, no English word would be a proper substitute for the Bengali term adda that Ghosh uses in the novel The Shadow Lines to refer to the long, leisurely conversation within a group of people which characterises the Bengali day. The term is central to the Bengali culture.
Niveditha Bagchi notes that the inclusion of Bengali terms may be an attempt to identify the primary audience of the book as being Bengali (Niveditha, 1993:196). When unfamiliar indigenous words are incorporated into the text, Ghosh follows the practice of glossing, though he is not consistent in this attempt. For example the transliterated word *pandal* is glossed when it is used for the first time and the meaning is not given but in the subsequent uses it is not glossed. The untranslated word *shoshti* is used without glossing even when it is used first, but the meaning is given in juxtaposition as ‘a perfect puja day.’ At times Ghosh does not give any explanation for the untranslated glossed word but goes on uninterrupted as if the word has become a part of the English register that he uses, leaving the readers to guess the meaning from the context. The term ‘*garri*’ is used without glossing and the readers have to infer from the context that it is a kind of horse-drawn carriage controlled by a coachman. Whenever Uma wants to go around, Kanhoji, the coachman would bring his ‘gaari’ to take her (GP: 111). This refusal to gloss “not only registers a sense of cultural distinctiveness but forces the reader into an active engagement with the horizons of culture in which these terms have meaning.” (Ashcroft et al., 1989, 64).

In *The Hungry Tide*, Nirmal while furnishing information about the pre-history of the Sundarban Islands to his nephew Kanai Dutt says that ‘in
the beginning there were no people, no embankment, no fields, just kada ar bada, mud and mangroves. If explanation for kada ar bada does not follow Kanai will be at a loss to understand the meaning of the term. Kanai, while retracing his earlier visit to Lusibari, recollects how Nirmal showed the relics of Whiteman’s occupation of the place and the sophisticated paraphernalia he used in his life. ‘This is a ‘shahebi chaubachcha’, a white man’s tank, Nirmal had said pointing to the bath tub. Shahebs use them to bath in (HT: 39). Such glosses foreground the continual reality of cultural distance. The aesthetic pleasure of the reader remains unaffected when the meaning is given next to the glossed word. Retaining indigenous words by glossing them reveals Ghosh’s conviction that true meaning of a word can never be expressed through explanations.

In certain contexts paraphrase is given before the glossed word. For instance, the notebook that Nirmal leaves for Kanai to read is referred to in *The Hungry Tide* as ‘a small cardboard covered note book’ a *khata*, of the kind generally used by school children. When there was an outbreak of plague the servants refused to come and work in the Outram house. There was stench and dirt everywhere and the only available help was that of the coachman-Sawant. Dolly appealed to Sawant: ‘Do something’, Mohan bai, ‘kutch to karo. The explanation for the Hindi words used is given first. Here we see
how Ghosh makes two national languages; Hindi and English co-exist without spoiling the aesthetic charm of the text. Polyglossia which Bakhtin has defined as the simultaneous presence of two or more national languages interacting within a single cultural system becomes conspicuous here. In *The Glass Palace* Ghosh uses the word ‘*tai*’ and gives the meaning in juxtaposition as ‘an elongated wooden house on stilts’. It is in this house that the company officer in charge of the camp resides (GP: 71).

In the process of getting assimilated with Indian culture, the Burmese Princesses exiled to Ratnagiri shows interest in wearing sari, a typical Indian dress. The Queen Supayalat tells Uma, the Collector’s wife, ‘it is more elegant – the sari looks more like a *htamein*’ (GP: 109). Here sari, the Indian dress and htamein, the Burmese dress are not glossed and no explanation is given as if these cultural terms are absorbed into the new ‘english’ created by the postcolonial writers. Words from Hindustani like *achha*, *bas karo*, *bachao* and other similar expressions frequently occur in the conversation of the queen.

Different words to refer to various types of boats are used in *The Glass Palace* the term *horis* when it is used first is followed by its explanation ‘as deep hulled catamarans with single outriggers’ (GP: 78) but when the word appears again it is used as a common English word. Names of varieties of boats like canoes, dug-out, raft etc. appear in *The Glass Palace*. In *The Hungry Tide*
Ghosh uses various names for boats like barges, dinghies, vessels, bhot bhotis (diesel boats) and noukha. In this way Ghosh tries to enlarge English vocabulary to suit to his needs and challenges the canonical literatures of the West. A closer observation of the novels of Ghosh will reveal how he has manipulated and appropriated the language of the oppressor to express the cultural logic of the decolonised countries. The Bengali word *gamcha* in *The Hungry Tide* is glossed but the meaning is not given in juxtaposition. The readers are made to infer the word meaning from the contextual comments as ‘a rectangular chequered towel’. This *gamcha* is a cultural symbol of the settlers of the country, a symbol of protection. The fact that Bengalis attribute special significance to *gamcha* is revealed when Piya says that her father preserved *gamcha* for years as if it was a part of his body, like his hair or like his nail clippings. He believed that his luck was woven into it and so he couldn’t think of parting with it. Fokir was wearing *gamcha* when he dived into the sea to rescue Piya from drowning. Kusum’s father used *gamcha* to escape from storm by tying himself to the tree with it. Fokir used *gamcha* to tie himself and Piya to the tree when the storm raged, though it couldn’t save his life.

Appropriating indigenous terms into the body of the novels enables Ghosh to express the cultural realities explored in the novel in an authentic
way. The religious hybridity of the tide country is underscored by incorporating religious terms peculiar to Hindus and Muslims into the Bon Bibi myth. The mantra of the myth was in Arabic but the rhythm of recitation was that of a puja (HT: 246). The word puja typical of Hindu devotional act is not glossed and no meaning is given. Ghosh takes for granted that the word due to its constant use has become a part of the reader’s vocabulary and no explanation or footnote is necessary to infer the meaning. At the same time the word azan is followed by its explanatory machinery as ‘the Muslim call to prayer.’

To reflect indigenous socio-cultural practices sometimes Ghosh coins new words and new symbols drawn from the local cultural traditions. Language is the most appropriate tool to give expressions to the culture of a country. How language and culture are interconnected and indivisible is clear in Ngugi’s words:

Language carries culture and culture carries particularly through orature and literature the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world (Ngugi, 1981:15).
Absorption of new indigenous words into the body of the text by glossing the word when it is used first, and leaving them unglossed in the subsequent uses, transliteration, leaving the words from other languages untranslated are some of the strategies that Ghosh uses to bring the marginalized linguistic minorities to the centre.