Chapter IV

Juxtaposing History: Nation and Family

The nation and the family have a great role to play in the life of an individual. The connection that the two have with one another is obvious and recognisable as both define a sense of identity: an individual is known and recognised by the family he belongs to and the nation he comes from. One cannot do without the other as nation and family co-exist in the life of a person. While nation may be regarded as a macro organisation representing people from all walks of life irrespective of their caste, creed, community or religion, status and position in society, family is a micro organisation that represents a group of individuals with blood ties belonging to the same caste, creed and community. In an individual’s life both nation and family define his/her specific identity. One cannot do without the other as nation and family co-exist in the life of a person. Any kind of intervention of an event in history has direct repercussions on the nation and the individual alike.

The notion of nation makes for an interesting reading in Indian writers in English from the time of the birth of the novel till date. Nation is referred to as a public domain controlled by state authority and power or as a “consolidation of state authority” (H. Seton-Watson. 5). Akin to
the above notion, Indian writers in English like Raja Rao present the nation as an entity that could incite a feeling of oneness bringing in a united sense of nationhood, national identity and pride amongst fellow countrymen. Rao’s *Kanthapura* is an example of such a representation of the nation used by writers to bring in solidarity and camaraderie among the people as they join hands to fight against colonial rule and subjugation. On the other hand, the works of contemporary Indian writers in English like Salman Rushdie, Allan Sealy, Mukul Keshavan and Amitav Ghosh present nation no longer as a symbol of “unified and singular national consciousness” (Sati 51). Contrarily they project nation as a conglomerate of diverse communities. It is in fact an entity that embodies royalty and the commoners as well. Therefore as “nation is not an imagined community” (Fredrick Luis Aldama) contemporary writers project nation that comprises people from all walks of life. The attempt of these writers is to exhibit stories of the lives of the least talked of section of the nation, the marginalised people of the country. The marginalised have their version of history yet history has never found their story worthy of documentation. These writers attempt to restore the numerous unheard histories of the marginalised subjected to an array of happenings in the nation. Thus nation is also perceived as “a creation of an ideology liable to re-invention” (Moral 139). In this connection, one could
conclude that the ideology of a nation should be to restore and bring to life the submerged and unheard histories of people.

If nation is public domain then family is private domain comprising of a family forming a society. Family is “. . . . a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction” (Haralambos & Heald 325). In the novels of these writers family is given a pivotal role and a function central to their characters. Family is the bond that knits yarns of love and togetherness in the lives of people. Interestingly Indian writers display familial ties so strong and binding that at times it assumes a place above the love and allegiance that they have for their nation. It is even more interesting to examine Amitav Ghosh’s novels, which parallelise nation and family in the context of its historical past. The present chapter attempts to understand and analyse the juxtaposition of history with nation and family in the works of Amitav Ghosh.

Ghosh’s novels manifest a concurrence of history with nation and family. Narratives of the nation tread on the same plane with narratives of the family. In narrating events of history Ghosh’s fiction patents a parallel history of the nation and the family. For example, in the novel, *Palace*, an event in history that triggers feuds in a nation has great impact on the life of the protagonist, Rajkumar Raha. The novel begins with the
sounds of cannons that no one could identify except the eleven year old migrant boy, Rajkumar. These are cannons that signal the marching of the British towards Burma. Ghosh narrates the historic invasion of British colonialism in 1885 while at the same time unravelling the history of Rajkumar where he traces Rajkumar’s decision to stay on in Burma and take utmost advantage of his flourishing business under British colonialism in Burma. On the one hand the narrative divulges on the historic exile of the king of Burma, King Thebaw, his queen, Queen Supayalat and the princesses and on the other hand the narrative turns towards the story of success and achievement of Rajkumar as he builds his empire on the ashes of the Burmese monarchy.

If the narrative on the nation’s / nations’ history focuses on the British invasion of Burma and the reduction of the Burmese loyalty to exiles and then to prisoners in India, the narrative on the family story in relation to national history traces Rajkumar’s ‘rags to riches - back to rags’ story. Interestingly Ghosh represents teak as a motivating force that makes the family saga and unmakes the nation’s history. The British invasion of Burma is done entirely out of a yearning for the lucrative return from teak. “If the British were willing to go to war over a stand of trees, it could only be because they knew of some hidden wealth secreted within the forest” (Palace 58). Similarly teak is the wealth that lures
Rajkumar to stay on in Burma and establish himself into a rich Indian timber businessman. In narrating a parallel history of nation and family, as discussed above, Ghosh is able to make a simultaneous presentation of the fate of the nation and the fate of the family. While colonialism has horrifying effects on the nation of Burma that very event in the history of Burma proves lucrative to the hero of the novel. Burma’s colonisation, a catastrophe to the country and its population is a boon to ordinary people like Rajkumar.

Within the parallel narrations of nation and family are embedded Ghosh’s interweaving of public and private turmoils. “He [Amitav Ghosh] excels above other writers like Rushdie and Seth as he interweaves the public tumults with the uproar in the lives of his characters and the turmoils within them. The hubbubs at national and international level are reflected in the turmoil at the personal level. . . . Ghosh’s tone is very urgent, poignant and appealing” (Joshi 70). Ghosh draws attention to a reading of the past as one that merges with stories of the nation and stories of the common people and their families. Undeniably there is a close association that the private occurrences have with the public at a particular period, time and situation in the lives of his characters. They go through a great amount of loss and pain as they are directly hit by historical events. The Second World War snatches all that
Rajkumar has cultivated and accomplished at the time of the British invasion of Burma in 1885. In 1941 his materialistic gain is lost to him. Just as when he has consolidated a stronghold on the timber resource, Burma was attacked by the Japanese. In the text Ghosh paints a vivid picture presenting a blend of effects of the World War II on the nation and its inhabitants:

[T]he central areas of the city were eerily empty, yet many major thoroughfares were impassable and they had to circle round and round to find their way out of the city. Buses lay abandoned at intersections; trams jumped off their tracks, rickshaws lay sideways across the road, electric cables and tramlines lay knotted across the footpaths (*Palace* 467).

In the same way Rajkumar joins his fellow counterparts in the Long March:

Everyone was heading in the same direction: towards the northern, landward passage to India – a distance of more than a thousand miles. They had their possessions bundled on their heads; they were carrying children on their back;
wheeling elderly people in carts and barrows (Palace 467).

Rajkumar returns with his family that includes his wife, Dolly, daughter-in-law, Manju and granddaughter, Jaya after the loss of his son, Neel who was buried underneath the timber as the elephants went berserk due to the deafening noise of the bombs. Sadly even before they reach their native country, the family loses another of its member. Manju who was no longer in a good frame of mind after the death of her husband, Neel gives up her life by plunging into the river: “It was no effort at all to slip, from the raft into the river. The river was fast, dark and numbingly cold” (Palace 474). The way the streets of Burma are in a state of chaos and disorder in the same way the prosperous Raha family now wears the look of loss, dejection and despondency.

Above all, Rajkumar’s home coming is no celebration but a burning down to ashes of his long built business empire in Burma. All that he could take back to his country are Dolly and Jaya. What the public tumult did to Rajkumar was even more telling and sad as back home in India he is a destitute reduced to the stature of a beggar begging for a place to shelter his family. The war that proves disastrous to nations also proves devastating to many individual families like the much longed for family of Rajkumar. Thus the Second World War that hits Burma mirrors
the tragedy that befalls the family of common people like Rajkumar Raha thereby, displaying the truth that there is a close alliance between the public and the private histories. The depiction above, most appropriately validates the observation by Novy Kapadia that “Amitav Ghosh, with his subtle humour and awareness of contemporary politics, ensures that private turmoil and crises are mirrored and intermeshed in public turmoil and crises” (“Contracting Strands” 122).

Public and private histories that interweave in the novels of Ghosh enhances the creative impulse of Ghosh as he presents the debilitating plight of a family when it is hit by an event in history. Ghosh appears to be taking a stronger stand here, which is a conspicuous and prominent discourse that bends itself more towards the family rather than the nation. His novels contain narratives that are more inclined towards an enhanced claim that private history has over public history of a nation.

Can history in the novels of Ghosh be viewed as one that aligns itself more with a familial discourse rather than a national discourse? When Ghosh narrates the two narratives of the history of Burma and the family of Rajkumar he does so with the intention of enhancing the relevance of his imaginary narrative rather than giving an account of the national history of Burma. The historical repercussions that people are
made to suffer are enhanced in his texts with Ghosh’s fervent inclination towards the grievances and plight of ordinary families of a nation.

The central concern of the textual narration is the focus that he gives to the major characters and their mood swings at the time when they confront a historical event that shatters their lives. At times they experience a loss that may even amount to death and disaster. In this context, Ghosh may even place his central characters in situations that are at times emotional and at other times distressing. Such a narrative concern variably makes ordinary peoples’ presence in his texts more exuberant than their historical counterparts. This is also the reason behind his preference for the depiction of familial pain, pathos and anxiety over the happenings in a nation. The example that follows will help establish the truth about whether Ghosh privileges the private over the public.

The statement above may hold true as national events are given secondary importance in Ghosh’s novels. They make their appearances in the texts as mere passing comments in the course of the familial narratives. In *Lines* the Khulna Riot of 1964 has been referred to only as an event in history that would elevate the tragic death that befalls on the Datta Chaudhary family. The main concern of the novel *Lines* is with narrations of personal lives and family relations of the Datta Chaudhary family. The major part of the novel concentrates on the narration of
Tridib’s family, with most of his relatives experiencing pain and anxiety largely over the death of the central figure, Tridib. While Amitav Ghosh gives in a lot of fictional space to the story to define its real worth and message only a brief narrative time and space is given to the historical background of the Khulna riot of 1964 in Dhaka that is concerned with Tridib’s death. Even a retelling of this piece of history offers no facts or explanation for the death of Tridib. The question that emerges is how else Ghosh could illustrate the pain and pathos of Tridib’s family members if he ends the novel without an elaborate account of what Tridib’s death caused his family members.

If Ghosh denies his readers the pain of the family members then his narrative would not be different from any historical record. Ghosh chooses otherwise. The riot finds its place in records of history but the loss of peoples’ lives and property is however not accounted for. Documented history only gives a one sided reading of a historical event. Therefore though history of the nation that encroaches into the lives of the Datta Chaudhary family is the crux of *Lines*, in reality such a depiction of historical events only enhances the reverence and irreverence of events in history. Here the historical event is important only because it allows Ghosh to relate what this event means to unhistorical figures. Ghosh is more responsive towards the numerous unheard stories of the
common man/woman who fall prey to the nation’s political and historical occurrences. Thus the narration of the tragic and horrifying experiences that Ghosh’s characters are made to go through become the culmination point for the author’s exploration into history.

Amitav Ghosh’s deliberate focus on the juxtaposed history of the nation and the family reveals the triumph of the writer in doing what conventional history failed. The fact that he privileges the private over the public establishes Ghosh’s priority, which is family. He is able to construct family and not the nation as the “central imaginative unit” (Frederick Luis Aldama) in his novels. Private history of familial ties and bonds stand taller than the public history of the nation. Family is the pivot that holds members of a family together. What matters is familial bond. In *Palace*, Ghosh presents the public narrative and private narrative simultaneously with the intention of enhancing the relevance of his imaginary narrative rather than giving an account of the national history of Burma. Ghosh is more inclined towards the grievances and plight of ordinary families of a nation. He is more focused on the new life that the Royal Family is living as banished people. In the same novel, Ghosh creates the character of Rajkumar as an accomplished man who has made a name for himself on his own terms and principles. But material wealth does not substitute for family. Rajkumar’s yearning for family is
significant as it is a revelation of the value and worth that a family has for man. “Beyond the ties of blood, friendship and immediate reciprocity, Rajkumar recognised no loyalties, no obligations and no limits on the compass of his right to provide for himself.” (*Palace*. 47) It is the ties of blood that Rajkumar longs for - he looks for love, affection and a family to call his own. Romance prevails because it is this romance that gives birth to a strong bond of love and happiness in the conjugal life of Rajkumar and his wife, Dolly Sein. He tells her

Miss Dolly, I have no family, no parents, no brothers, no sisters, no fabric of small memories from which to cut a large cloth . . . . I have no option but to choose my own attachment . . . it is a freedom . . . thus not without value (*Palace* 147-8).

Thus Amitav Ghosh’s novels centre on family because family is truly the central imaginative unit that binds his characters together.

The authorial purpose behind the privileging of the family history over national history is to underline the need to hear the voices of helpless individuals. A reading of Ghosh’s texts gives room to analyse the above. A question appears to be gnawing Ghosh’s mind over the incomplete depiction of historical events by documented history. His
texts present numerous episodes that largely lend a voice to the unheard voices. These are examples that seem to be claiming some space in history for the disregarded lot of the nation. If left unrecorded is it enough for the world and generations to come to know and remember that history only speaks of the riot that did take place in 1964? This would only imply that there is an absence of a humane worldview in that small piece of news about the death of fourteen people in the Dhaka riot is what is missing in the documented history of the event. Why should stories of common people attached to the riot be left unrecorded? Perhaps Ghosh has a different answer to this for the narrator in the novel Lines is not willing to leave his familial story untold. He is appalled that his friends have not heard of the Khulna riot. The relevance of this news to the narrator and his family become miniscule representations in comparison to its presentation as national news if his friends are unaware of the existence of such a riot that his family is trapped in. He tries hard to make them remember that there was a riot that broke out in 1964 and they could not have missed it. After all it was an unforgettable riot for his family.

‘This was a terrible riot,’ I said. ‘All riots are terrible,’ Malik said. ‘But it must have been a local thing. . . . it’s hardly comparable to a war.’ I was determined now that I would not let my past vanish without trace: I was
determined to persuade them of its importance (*Lines* 221).

Therefore on no account is Ghosh prepared to overlook the situations of the unrecorded figures of history. He wants history to give some place to people like Tridib whose murder has shattered and disoriented the lives of his family members and loved ones. Ghosh himself writes in his essay “The Greatest Sorrow” that the Indo-Chinese war of 1962,

. . . was a war that was fought in a remote patch of terrain, far removed from major population centres, and it had few repercussions outside the immediate area. The riots of 1964 on the other hand, had affected many major cities and had caused extensive civilian casualties. Yet there was not a single book devoted to this event: a cursory glance at a library’s bookshelves was enough to establish that in historical memory a small war counts for much more than a major outbreak of civil violence. . . . Why was it that we can look back upon these events in sorrow and outrage and yet be incapable of divining any lasting solutions or any portents for the future (*Indian* 316).
The history of a family may give a mere myopic view of the past. It may also be only an appendage of history; nonetheless it certainly is a part of history. Only when the history of the nation is placed side by side with the history of the family can history be viewed in its entirety. Therefore through his works Ghosh listens to the voice of the voiceless and their determination to speak out to the outside world their brush with history. In privileging family over nation to underline familial experiences he not only gives them a voice but also unravels what lie beneath the public incident that his characters are nettled in.

What lie beneath the history of a nation are numerous histories of diverse ordinary families that have never been chronicled because “. . . the riots had faded away from the newspapers, disappeared from the collective imagination of ‘responsible opinion’, vanished, without leaving a trace in the histories and bookshelves. They had dropped out of memory into the crater of a volcano of silence” (Lines 231). An individual’s precious life is lost in the tide of events in a nation yet that nation’s history has no regard for the loss. The loss may be one that is beyond description to a family yet the nation does not account for familial loss. An individual life of an ordinary person remains submerged into the deluge of national misfortune. While the nation grips in fear and chaos due to an untoward communal clash, family members of the Datta
Chaudhary in *Lines* experience the doubled pain, loss and tragedy in their visit to Dhaka in order to take their uncle along with them back to India, their new home. Little do they fathom that in the long run they would actually be trapped in the catastrophic riots that results in the loss of their two family members, Tridib and Jethamoshai who have been brutally murdered before their own eyes: “The car was stopped. By a mob . . . . But your grandmother’s uncle was following behind us. When I got there . . . . [t]hey were all dead. The old man’s head had been hacked. And they’d cut Tridib’s throat, from ear to ear” (*Lines* 250-1).

These unchronicled private histories of ordinary people have been completely brushed aside for “riots must thus have no ‘meaning’ in the lexicon of modernity, except in accounts of their suppression” (Suvir Kaul 284). These are the submerged and suppressed accounts in the history of a nation that Ghosh does not wish to be left untouched, untold and unheard.

A reading of the forgotten, hidden and subjugated stories of Amitav Ghosh’s novels leave many questions unanswered: What is the nation’s history? Is nation’s history its political history only? Can national history sideline citizen’s history? Can history of a nation simply be literally a biography of kings and queens documenting their lives? Can history of a nation be one that fails to capture the pain of a family that
loses its livelihood and loved ones as they are entangled in an event in history? Sadly these are loopholes that any historical document with a traditional orientation has failed to address. But literary works of writers like Ghosh seal the lacunae by giving a place of importance to stories that the history of the nation disregards.

In *Tide*, the authorial choice of beginning the novel with an alternative history creates awareness of the binary and hierarchical oppositions between the two types of history. The unaccounted selfless fight and sacrifice of Kusum in the novel is more important than political history (Morichjhapi event of 1978-79) for Ghosh. He begins where history ends. Helpless people like Kusum have been subjected to miserable conditions for no fault of theirs. The question that emerges here is what the sacrifice of Kusum means to her nation. She fights against all odds for her peoples’ welfare but her sacrifice means nothing to her nation. Fighting selflessly for the rehabilitation of her people Kusum leaves behind her family, her only son, Fokir. She deprives Fokir of her love and care for the sake of the collective good of her people. The entire loss is of the young Fokir who lives his life without the warm comfort of his mother the only family that he has. In spite of all that the small family of this mother and son has no place in the history of the nation.
The telling rhetoric in the story of Kusum centres on the query whether the nation’s history has anything at all to offer to the numerous Kusums, who die a selfless death for the sake of the people of the land. The truth is perhaps painful because though Kusum gives up her family and son for the people of her country, history has not been sensitive enough towards a contribution by unhistorical people. Nirmal may have written down in his notebook every detail of the event along with Kusum’s participation and sacrifice leaving it behind for his nephew, Kanai with the hope that Kanai will spread the word. But sadly even this last ray of hope to bring to the world the other side of the history of the event of Morichjhapi is lost forever when Kanai loses the notebook: “I was bringing it back here, carefully wrapped in plastic. But I slipped in the water, and it was swept out off my hands” (Tide 386). The optimism with which Nirmal leaves behind the notebook for his nephew crumbles to the ground. Could this be a conscious deliberation of Ghosh in presenting the obvious pessimism that surrounds traditional historiography through the act of the notebook being swept into the waters? Can historical record give a place of worth to the private history of a family? Can there be a familial history that will be placed above or even alongside the public history of a nation? Perhaps these are mere whims of the author that may take a long time or may not even be
incorporated in the documented history of a nation. Therefore Amitav Ghosh as a literary writer unfolds what otherwise traditional history hesitates to even mention. His reading of family history succeeds in the toppling of hierarchies and bridging in gaps between the public and the private histories. Voiceless histories of families like that of Kusum’s are therefore juxtaposed to the voiced history of a nation in the novels of Amitav Ghosh.

The presence of historical figures in Ghosh’s texts is deliberate and functional. The purpose behind is to explore what history has denied even the once great figures of history. They give Amitav Ghosh a chance to view public turmoil in the garb of the private turmoil. More importantly he remaps public turmoil in the context of private turmoil. This approach only highlights Ghosh’s intention to draw attention to the lacunae in the latter. This can be traced to Amitav Ghosh’s retelling of the Burmese history from the point of view of the personal lives of the Royal Family in *Palace* rather than from a public historical point of view, thereby resulting in the toppling of hierarchies between the private and the public histories. The deportment of the Royal Family to Ratnagiri, India undoubtedly wipes out monarchy from Burma. But it also has a more important aspect to it that Ghosh deliberately focuses upon; the lives of the last king and queen of Burma and their children on exile. Traditional
history may fail to record the way of life of the Royal Family but Ghosh does not. His focus is more on the life pattern of Royalty as they are reduced to the status from monarchy to royal prisoners living as slaves in their prison in Outram House.

A quarter of the novel is dedicated to the little stories of the family of the last king and queen of Burma. Ghosh carves depressing images of the lives of the family of kings and queens as they are huddled together in a foreign land. Here they have no subjects to preside upon. They are rather put in an even sorry state as they are deprived of all the luxuries and entitlements due to kings and queens. The pain with which the Royalty is made to live in, the anger of Queen Supayalat who is not willing to be restricted in Ratnagiri without any hope of a return to her country, the somber and slowly degenerating King Thebaw, who finally breathed his last as a prisoner and also the ultimate mingling of the princesses with ordinary people till it finally leads to the marriage of the first princess with their gatekeeper - are stories that Ghosh explores. These are undocumented histories of a Royal Family that loses its divine right to rule over its land and people. History no longer cares to trace and document their decrepit lives. Burma lost its age-old heritage of monarchy but the Royal Family stayed closely bonded to one another in the foreign land far away from their country. National history is there for
all to read from various chronicles of history but the private lives of the last king and queen of Burma are what Ghosh is keen to tell his readers.

Ghosh does not showcase only vociferous impact of public history on kings and queens reducing historical figures to ordinary people but ushers in the more drastic effect that history has on ordinary citizens of a country. The catastrophe that it can cause to the private lives of ordinary people is not only obvious but more pathetically tragic. The toppling of hierarchies between the two histories of the public and the private leading to an expansion of horizons can be seen in Ghosh’s approach to the history of Partition. Even after sixty three years of Indian Independence, the issue of Partition is addressed by Ghosh in a manner that expresses a contemporary concern on the subject. Partition of India is not a mere partition of the geography of the country. It was a step not only debilitating but also one that is accompanied with a lot of violence and bloodshed. While India is severed into two, families and bonds are also cut and mutilated at times even beyond recognition. The discord between the Hindus and the Muslims is experienced by the Datta Chaudhary family in 1964. This innocent family becomes a victim of a communal riot that is not their making. In the novel it is the repercussion of this one historical event that leads to pain and loss of this family. This one event
in history creates a void in the hearts of the family members that Ghosh successfully displays in this text.

Amitav Ghosh also illustrates a clash between the geographical public space that politics and history of nations determine and the private space that families enfold within themselves. The clash persists because the demands and requirements of the nation may be at odds with the lives of private individuals. This is exactly what Thamma in *Lines* goes through after the Partition of the country. Her home is now at odds with her nationality.

Home ought to be the place where one was born and brought up, sealed by an emotional bond, where one can claim one’s right without any hesitation. And if there was a basic confusion on this score – about the very roots of one’s origin – an individual’s identity would be in question (Pabby 77-8).

The conflict between the public and the private becomes even more intense when public history intervenes and interferes into Thamma’s life in the face of a communal riot in the land of her birth. This time Thamma knows that her nation has let her down. “Her native city of Dhaka, which she visits for the first time after Partition, is now the “other” of home, a
place of danger, threat and instability” (Sharmani Patricia Gabriel 49). Her nation has turned against her. Her family members are sacrificed at the altar of communal hatred and antagonism. The nation that is so close to her heart becomes a dead bed of two important members of her family; Tridib and Jethamoshai. The little hope left to plant her identity in her country, her home in Dhaka is guillotined at the threshold of a riot and violence that is meted out to her and her family. Betrayed by the nation that had always been hers Thamma makes her choice. She places her family before that of her nation. She now thinks only of her kindred and is not ready to bear the loss of another member of her family. She even gives away her prized possession, a gold chain to the war in 1965 [India Pakistan War April 1965 – September 1965] telling her grandson that “I had to, don’t you see? For your sake; for your freedom. We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out” (Lines 237).

Thamma is not the only character who goes through this dilemma of Partition. Ghosh here speaks for the many Thammas that are made to bow down before the politics and history of the nation. At the same time Ghosh is also lending a voice to the clash and conflict that politics play with precious lives of people. On the one hand she is confronted with the love and loyalties of her family and on the other hand Thamma is aware of the allegiance that she owes to the nation she was born in. As the cold
hands of death devours the lives of Tridib and Jethamoshai, Thamma only thinks of preserving her own. The only clear choice that Thamma makes is her family before anything else. No more sacrifices of her family are to be made at the altar of public history. Family is the binding force that has to be guarded at all cost. What comes before Thamma is the love that she has for her family members. She begins to perceive her nation in the context of the relevance that the nation has on members of her family. What matters is familial bond than nation. In this juxtaposition of history, geographical public space and the private space of families achieve their respective objectives: the irrelevance of lines drawn out of conflict in a nation and the relevance of family that surpasses any riots and violence. Even here, for ordinary people it is family that is more meaningful and important in their lives. The choice of family over nation is the hallmark well made.

A conflict of thought and ideology endures when Ghosh subverts grand narratives of history for concealed histories of the suppressed. He drifts away from traditional historiography of placing the history of the nation in the hierarchy of reading the past. Amitav Ghosh shifts the focus from history of the nation to history of the little people; this time speaking out for the subaltern group. In Chromosome, when Ghosh talks of the history of the malaria vector he is also making way for the meaning
of this historical event to the nation and to a subaltern group. The Nobel Prize that was awarded to Ronald Ross in 1906 was and will continue to be a historic moment in the history of medical science in the world. The discovery is an achievement of national stature and pride to the nation and the people of Great Britain. But Amitav Ghosh does not rest here. He sees beyond the discovery to arrive at an alternative view of the research. Acknowledging Ronald Ross’s achievement Ghosh prepares his readers with an even greater display of historical perception that is important to be highlighted. Thus he juxtaposes the history of the malaria research with the history of the nation and the subversive history of the subaltern agency or the voice of the voiceless. The bond that the subaltern group shares with one another as a family is higher above anything else before Ghosh. Expressions from the text such as - “. . . they’ve planted Lutchman exactly where they want him. . .” (65) “. . . Lutchman succeeds in planting a crucially important idea in his [Ross] head: that the malaria vector might be one particular species of mosquito.” (65). “‘Eureka’ he [Ross] says to his diary, “the problem is solved” (66) and “‘Whew!’ says Lutchman, skimming the sweat off his face. ‘Thought he’d never get it’” (66) – these are lines that prove that Ghosh places his credibility on the voice of the voiceless people. Ghosh makes an attempt to showcase the effort of these people. Their contributions cannot be ignored or sidelined.
Ghosh’s sincere effort here is to allow the subaltern family to share the same space of honour and the pride of the nation as is showered on the English scientist, Ronald Ross.

The subaltern subjects in the characters of Mangala and Laakhan and even Murugan himself are placed under one roof by Ghosh. He displaces traditional history only to create a place of respect and appreciation for the subaltern family. In doing so he makes way for the subaltern subject to be heard. He does not deter to even subvert the grand narrative of an international stature substituting it with ordinary narratives of common people. He spells out his purpose clearly which is to lend a voice to the so far subjugated voiceless subaltern people. The forgotten and overshadowed people emerge as contenders well received of a regard worthy of appreciation in the texts of Ghosh. It is even more passionately drawn when Ghosh puts these people in one umbrella giving them the status of a family. They represent each other and also live closely knit with one another.

The chapter has adequately dealt with Amitav Ghosh’s objective of juxtaposing history with nation and family. In the ambit of history there does exist a close tie of the private with the public. His texts display in great detail the way in which private histories of an individual and a family are at times directly or indirectly influenced by the public history
of the nation they belong to. His effort to give evidence to the turns in the lives of his characters as they fall prey to situations and circumstances of the happenings in their nation and country is well achieved. Ghosh is aware that contemporary politics surrounding political events like Partition of the country has a deep seated impact on numerous families of undivided India. Private turmoil and crisis are a reflection of the turmoil in the nation yet the private have always been suppressed. How can it be right for a creative writer like him to decline these families their due? Therefore what history denies Ghosh concurs in his novels.

Amitav Ghosh depicts many challenges that his characters are made to confront as a family enhancing individual private history to that of public history. He does this by subverting grand narratives of history and supplants them with histories of subaltern people. In the minds and hearts of these people are embedded pains galore that have not yet found an outlet. People who have never spoken out loud about the repercussions of events in history in their lives are given a chance to open their hearts and unburden their souls. When Amitav Ghosh talks of history he is actually placing on the same plane what history has done to the nation and what history can do to a family. In presenting the two together it is as if Ghosh is holding a mirror that reflects the position of a nation as well as a family thrown in the mesh of political cataclysm/debacle. Evidently,
public discourse of a national stature and private discourse of a personal standing are placed alongside one another. He unravels the private histories that lives in the hearts of those gravely hit by historical events. He lends his voice to the voiceless. He does not deter to even push public history to the background in order to bring private history of families to the fore.

The narration of the history of the nation and the history of a family are seen to be trotting hand in hand alongside each other. What is of greater worth and value to Ghosh is the history of the family and the lives of unhistorical people. Ghosh’s motive is achieved when private histories of an individual and a family appear larger than public history of a nation. What has failed to find place in historical records finds space in fictional creative writings. Thus holding true what Someshwar Sati’s comments: “It seems as if Ghosh is making a telling point – the story of the individual is swallowed by the history of the nation and in an age of agnostic individualism this tendency to erase the individual should be not only carefully guarded against but also fearlessly exposed and severely censored” (54).

In summation, what happens in a juxtaposed reading of family history and nation’s history where family is seen in the larger context of the national history is that Ghosh is able to achieve the following: he
exhibits a parallel history of the nation along with the history of the family, he interweaves public tumults with private turmoil; he privileges the private history of family over the public history of the nation; he maps the unmapped marginalised history of the family; he creates awareness of the binary and hierarchical oppositions between the two types of history; he topples history to significantly expand the horizon of history beyond its narrow confines and also subverts grand narratives for the subaltern voice. Thus by juxtaposing history with nation and family Amitav Ghosh perceives history in its totality, giving a complete rendition of history. Such an endeavour to explore family and nation’s history only helps tone up the relevance of Ghosh’s examination and exploration of the history of migration and displacement, a relevant issue that is to be discussed in the next chapter.