Introduction: The Politics of Subversion

Since the beginning of human life on the earth when the dominance of good over evil or vice-versa took place, subversion occurred in one form or the other. It has always been the law of Nature that great and massive systems or institutions have been subverted in all the ages after a considerable succession of events. Subversion calls for the questioning spirit of the age and its society. The writers of every age subvert the literary norms and conventions of the prior age. Subversion has been noticed more prominently in postmodern novels. However, M.Keith Booker in his *Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature* sees the postmodernist spirit in Chaucer, Milton and other medieval writers. Today, in the era of post existentialism, post modernism, and post structuralism, there is no such belief as completion of structures. The spirit of inquiry pervades this era. It is a matter of fact that without questioning, inertness creeps into the structures of knowledge and mars their efficacy. Thus, there is a need for the inquisition of the hitherto accepted and recognized structures of beliefs and values.

As it is understood today, subversion is a convoluted postmodern literary device critically defined and examined by critics. There are many techniques of subversion which deconstruct the established and accepted traditional systems of knowledge and dominant ideology of society to bring an overall change. It strikes at the foundations of social, linguistic, political, economic, and historical hierarchies and aims to transgress any fixed boundaries as there is no rigidity of such formations. In fiction, subversion takes place at the level of surface, theme, characterization, setting, language and narrative techniques and even at the playfulness of novel structure. Transgression is also seen as a synonym for subversion as it takes for non compliance with rules of society or norms of behaviour. Transgression of the boundaries is done for rejection of the dominant culture in favour of the marginalized culture.

Politics deals with the change in a system, an authority and a set of hierarchies. New forms of power and social struggle that are presented in the works of fiction hint at some political underpinning. Novels do not exist in a vacuum. They are political documents which are instruments of bringing about social and political change. The underpinning of Amitav Ghosh’s fiction is political which is set up in systems and it is in the layers of these systems that the nuances of politics have to be
discovered. It is not merely a statement of a narrator, character or the author that makes the work political. The strain of politics runs throughout the entire novel. The traditional way of oppositionality seems to be discarded in the fiction of Amitav Ghosh that brings the element of subversion to the centre. His “politics of subversion” generates dialectics. It refers to the transgression of binaries that will help the author envisage democratic revolution. The author strives to have a democracy of all different voices to create Bakhtinian polyphony.

In this context, it is highly interesting to study the fictional works of Amitav Ghosh whose ultimate goal is to install the truly democratic voices to materialize actual change in social and political systems. The change that Amitav Ghosh attempts to convey is not a sudden or impulsive wonder. It is a gradual striking at a system by so many people (his characters, often narrator) that hints at bringing out change in real life. The present thesis attempts to explore this change in most of the fictional works of Amitav Ghosh. The gradual subversion of rigid and inhumane traditional systems of thoughts, rules and knowledge forms the essence of the aim and agenda of the novelist.

This thesis focuses on Amitav Ghosh’s narrative strategies and characterization which will be discussed as trying to subvert traditional literary genres. Thereby, these elements procure a privileged place for the marginalized, the unspoken and the homeless who establish their articulative voice with an urge for cooperation and solidarity across innumerable discursive segregations. The primary purposes of this thesis are to discover different techniques of subversion used by Amitav Ghosh and explore the purpose of the novelist for making politics of subversion occur at various levels of narrative strategies, characterization, language and reference to traditional models of oral narration and incorporation of mythic legends. This is done in the hope that such an approach to narrative representation and characterisation based on the Bakhtinian theories and deconstructive way of reading might bring a new perspective in the understanding of the fiction of Amitav Ghosh.

In this study, Bakhtinian theories and deconstruction are placed in the context of Amitav Ghosh’s narratives to show how fiction and these critical methods of studying literature can explicate and back up one another and set examples for how we conceive of the world. The deliberation in the subsequent chapters attempts to
establish Amitav Ghosh’s output as an incorporation of these theories examining the role played by the novelist in highlighting subversion implied in the narrative strategies and characterization. The study tries to highlight Amitav Ghosh’s concerns of giving equal importance to the contradictory ideologies present in the narrative through multiple voices. The way in which the novelist deconstructs the hitherto privileged binaries is being analysed.

The fifth chapter in the study focuses on the craft employed by the novelist to weave the art of focalization through polyphony of voices. The thesis explores the narrative strategies in the novels of Amitav Gosh which integrate fact and fiction to recreate unbiased awareness among the readers about the contemporary social and ecological issues. An attempt has been made to illustrate the position of Amitav Ghosh as subverting the superficial, inhumane, unyielding and narrow-minded structures of thoughts and his role in reconstructing the lost and neglected cultural heritage and myths of the communities he came into contact with.

Throughout the present study, it is my contention that Amitav Ghosh’s novels transform the standard discourses of Western modernity or even Indian elitism by producing diverse narrative constructions that have a subversive relationship to the discursive knowledge production strategies that originally produced them. This view is enabled by the generic hybridity through the application of Bakhtinian theories and deconstruction of the binaries.

One of the assumptions on which the study has been based is that a collection of multiple voices and consciousness free of authorial control enables a fictional work to stand apart by emphasizing all different voices/ideologies with equal magnitude. The novelist has always been interested in bringing the subaltern, the resourceless and unsettled people to the centre by empowering them in their own way. The metaphors and images of water, boat, weaving, birds, test-tube, scalpel etc, depicted in Amitav Ghosh’s novels seem to suggest the articulative power and the intuitive perception that the dispossessed own. It also hints at the subsequent need to include the dispossessed in the mainstream society. The study aims to explicate Amitav Ghosh’s method of dismantling discursive totalities that are built on binary constructions which are at the heart of Amitav Ghosh’s project, moving towards the reconstruction of systems of thoughts by transcending discursive divisions.
The study aims at exploring the unique attributes of his novels which offer an insightful and multifaceted view on the contemporary issues and concerns that he writes about. He expresses his views in an interview on the effects of his background as a historian, journalist and an anthropologist on his novels:

For me, the value of the novel as a form, is that it is able to incorporate elements of every aspect of life- history, natural history, rhetoric, politics, beliefs, religion, family, love, sexuality. As I see it, the novel is a meta-form that transcends the boundaries that circumscribe other kinds of writing, rendering meaningless the usual workaday distinctions between historian, journalist, anthropologist, etc. (The AsiaSociety interview by Michelle Caswell).

This foregrounds one of the chief traits of his writing, that is, its generic heterogeneity or discursive inventiveness, which enables him to preserve insight of various kinds of discourses, voices and agents, while narrating into existence unforeseen connections between them.

Levinas’ philosophy is discussed in Chapter Two with reference to the relationship of language and the Other. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas considers that the Other eludes the cognitive powers of the knowing subject. It means that the Other exists outside the ontology of traditional Western philosophy, which conceives of all beings as objects that can be internalized by consciousness or grasped through an adequate representation. The Other cannot be described in language but is ultimately unreachable (100-112). Levinas’s method of concentration on the way the self constructs itself in relationship to the Other, and the way in which language and discourse distort the Other resonate strongly with Amitav Ghosh’s fiction that seeks to represent the minorities and silenced group of the world.

Another important theoretical background used for justifying the presence of the politics of subversion in Amitav Ghosh’s fiction is deconstruction. In the West, the concepts of rationality, knowledge and truth that were developed during the Enlightenment period became the fertile grounds for the metaphysic of modernity. The ideology of modernity is heavily dependent on binary constructions of science/religion, rationality/irrationality, presence/absence and so on. The world is largely conceived through separate opposites divided into two antagonistic poles.
Later, postmodern ideas were developed with the goal of destabilising such ways of thinking. This consequential postmodernist dissolution of modernist, separate, individual subjectivity, the dismantling of the ideologies based on binaries and the highlighting of the textuality and the representational character of different versions of reality seem to be adopted by Amitav Ghosh. The study desires to explore the novels of Amitav Ghosh based on this assumption in order to discover the politics of subversion through various techniques.

The multiple and distinct voices of the major and minor characters of Amitav Ghosh bring into focus the transgressive concept of Mikhail Bakhtin’s polyphony. It broadly refers to the existence of multiple voices in a discourse. In literature, polyphony is a feature of narrative, which includes a diversity of points of view and voices. The concept was introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin, based on the musical concept of polyphony. One of the most known examples of polyphony is Dostoevsky's prose. Bakhtin has characterized Dostoevsky's work as polyphonic; unlike Tolstoy's novels that Bakhtin calls monologic as various voices in his novels are subordinated to the author's voice. Dostoevsky does not appear to aim for a “single vision” but instead moves beyond simply describing situations from various angles.

In the similar vein, Richard Rorty notices the significance of the existence of multiple versions as a strategy of novelists:

The novelist's substitute for the appearance-reality distinction is a display of diversity of viewpoints, a plurality of descriptions, a plurality of descriptions of the same event. What the novelist finds especially comic is the attempt to privilege one of these descriptions [...] What he finds most heroic is not the ability sternly to reject all descriptions save one, but rather the ability to move back and forth between them. (Essays on Heidegger 74)

This is highly significant for the purposes of the study, as the narrative strategies in the novels of Amitav Ghosh include a heightened awareness of the existence of multiple versions of same events (see Chapter Two). Amitav Ghosh's narration “presents us with individuality and diversity alike without any attempt to reduce either to the terms of a singular scheme of totality” (Gibson 8). This point is significant in my interpretation of Amitav Ghosh’s novels as in his writing, novels
turn into expressions of the polyphonic pluralism by intertwining the particular characteristics of individual subjects with the characteristics of the surrounding society, thereby creating a heterogeneous whole.

The study intends to utilize the primary works of Amitav Ghosh and the secondary sources of information to explore the politics of subversion. All the fictional and most of the non-fictional works including travelogues, prose pieces and articles of Amitav Ghosh are reviewed. However, the thesis will be confined to the following four novels: *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Sea of Poppies* (2008). The secondary works such as review articles and critical works on Amitav Ghosh, which support the argument of the study, have been analysed to trace the network of literary theories used in his novels. Secondary sources available on the Internet and interview articles in journals have also been explored to support the arguments.

Chapter One introduces the rationale, assumptions, mode of exploration and the framework of the study. An attempt has been made to define and justify the title of the thesis and discuss its relevance in the present literary scenario. It explores in detail the theoretical framework of Bakhtinian polyphony and Deconstruction. It endeavours to prove how polyglossia, diglossia, heteroglossia and code-switching are some of the conspicuous constitutive factors of the linguistic experimentation that make Amitav Ghosh’s novels unique. Chapter Two, Chapter Four and Chapter Five explore the novels of Amitav Ghosh in the light of these linguistic devices.

Chapter Two describes and analyses the theoretical development of the study focusing on the technique of the novelist to work for annihilating binaries in *The Circle of Reason*. The chapter explores the subversion of binaries and characterization in the theoretical background of deconstruction and Bakhtinian polyphony. It also has a reference to the philosophical investigations of Emmanuel Levinas. Chapter Three illustrates the pattern of subversive attributes of *The Calcutta Chromosome* by pleading the case of the silent and mute group against the background of deconstruction, Bakhtinian polyphony, Christian philosophy and richness of Indian folk culture.

Chapter Four exemplifies the working of polyphony through the setting and pattern of points of view in *The Hungry Tide*. Chapter Five tries to explore the art of
focalization employed by the novelist in Sea of Poppies with the aim of witnessing polyphony at work along with annihilating the discourses of superfluous truth inscribed in the Western history to subjugate the workings of colonized minds and it is highlighted with the novelist’s linguistic experimentation using narrative techniques. Chapter Six summarises the observations made in the body of the text and takes them to a conclusion.

Before moving further let us go through the short biography of Amitav Ghosh who “always dreamt of becoming a writer.” Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta (now Kolkata), a city that is foregrounded throughout his work. His father’s position as a Lieutenant- Colonel in the army made him spend time in Sri Lanka, Iran and Bangladesh and India. Much of his writing is based on the issues of migration, families, past and alienation. He had his schooling from Doon School in Dehra Dun and then completed his B.A. in History in 1976 from St. Stephen’s College. In 1978, he obtained an M.A. in Sociology from the University of Delhi. He went to pursue his postgraduate work from St. Edmund Hall, Oxford in 1979 and obtained a diploma in social anthropology while also learning Arabic in Tunis.

In 1980, he left for Egypt to do the fieldwork for his doctoral research from Faculty of Arts, University of Alexandria. He was awarded D.Phil. in Social Anthropology in 1982 for his thesis on “Kinship in Relation to Economic and Social Organisation of an Egyptian Village Community.” In An Antique Land can be seen as a reflection of his own experience as a researcher in the strange and different country. After completing his doctorate, Amitav Ghosh worked as a journalist for The Indian Express in Delhi. Amitav Ghosh lives in New York with his wife, Deborah Baker, author of In Extremis: The Life of Laura Riding (1993) and a senior editor at Little Brown and Co. and his children Leela and Nayan. He divides his time among Kolkata, Goa, Brooklyn and New York.

Amitav Ghosh has to his credit various academic positions at a number of universities: Delhi University, Harvard University, Columbia University and Queens College of the City University of New York. A galaxy of awards adorns and acknowledges his fiction. His first novel The Circle of Reason (1986) was translated into many languages. Its French edition received the Prix Medicis Etranger (a prestigious literary award in France). His second novel The Shadow Lines (1988) won
two prestigious Indian awards, the Sahitya Akademi Award (1999) and the Ananda Puraskar. His third novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) won the Arthur C. Clarke Award for science fiction in 1997. The novel was filmed by Gabriele Salvatores, the Oscar winning director of *Mediterraneo*.

Amitav Ghosh is the winner of 1999 Pushcart Prize (an award given for stories, poems and essays published in a literary magazine in the U.S.) for his essay “The March of the Novel through History: My Father's Bookcase.” His fourth novel *The Glass Palace* (2000) bagged the 2001 Frankfurt e-Book Award sponsored by International e-Book Award Foundation at the Frankfurt Book Fair in January 2005. He declined the best book award for the Eurasian region of the Commonwealth Writers Prize for *The Glass Prize* as he objected to the classification of the “Commonwealth Literature.” *The Hungry Tide* (2004) was awarded the Hutch Crossword Book Prize, a major Indian award. Above all, he was awarded the Padma Sri in 2007. His novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008) was short listed for the Man Booker Prize, 2008 and was awarded the Crossword Book Prize and the IndiaPlaza Golden Quill Award. Amitav Ghosh has served on the jury of the Locarno Film Festival, Switzerland and the Venice Film festival. In 2010, he was awarded honorary doctorates by Queens College, New York, and the Sorbonne, Paris. Alongwith Margaret Atwood, he was also a joint winner of Dan David Award for 2010. In 2011, he was awarded the International Grand Prix of the Blue Metropolis Festival in Montreal.

Much less known is the fact that, simultaneously, Amitav Ghosh has been writing non-fictional prose, reflective essays, political commentary, book reviews, autobiographical articles, academic expositions and translations from Bengali and literary anthropology. In his non-fiction, Amitav Ghosh in general uses similar strategies to those used in his fiction. He conjures up unforeseen connections through juxtaposing and interweaving lives of small or alternatively real-life people against the canvas of large historical developments. His non-fiction work *In An Antique Land* (1992) is subversive history in the guise of a traveller’s tale. It is an amalgam of fiction, history, travel-writing and anthropology which makes us rethink the political boundaries that divide the world and generic boundaries that divide narrative styles.

The collection of prose pieces entitled *The Imam and the Indian* (2002) shares with his fiction certain characteristic subjects and concerns like the connection between the past and present, between events and memories and between people, cultures and countries that have shared a past. The travelogue *Dancing In Cambodia, At Large in Burma* (1998) is based upon the novelist’s travel experiences to countries like Cambodia and Burma and his personal contacts with the native people he had met. *Countdown* (1999) is the outcome of Amitav Ghosh’s journey into the Pokharan area where Indian government tested five nuclear devices and he expresses the opinion that the pursuit of nuclear weapons in the subcontinent is the moral equivalent of civil war. *Incendiary Circumstances: A Chronicle of the Turmoil of Our Times* (2006) is a compilation of essays spanning two decades.

Amitav Ghosh in an interview with Subash Jeyan, states that the most interesting thing about a novel is that it allows a writer a range with different forms of exploration. The analogy of dissimilar and unforeseen things is found aplenty in Amitav Ghosh’s fiction. For instance, there is an unanticipated comparison between a landscape and a book in *The Hungry Tide*, which exemplifies the pattern of different points of view embedded everywhere in that place...*in a way a landscape too is not unlike a book- a compilation of pages that overlap without any two ever being the same. People open the book according to their taste and training, their memories and desires: for a geologist the compilation opens at one page, for a boatman at another and still another for a ship’s pilot, a painter and so on. On occasion these pages are ruled with lines that are invisible to some people, while being for others, as real, as*
charged and as volatile as high-voltage cables” (224) [italics original]. This aspect concerning the pattern of several points of view is discussed in Chapter Four.

With the influence of Herman Melville and Balzac, Amitav Ghosh explores various sections of society considering their cultural discreteness. In many interviews, he has stated that his works are very deeply engaged with Kolkata and Bengal. Shameem Black examines the two novels of Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide* in her pioneering work. Her book, like Amitav Ghosh’s novels, concentrates on “moments when subjects seek to represent forms of social difference that have been associated with oppression, marginality, or ideologies of inferiority” (*Fiction Across Borders* 3). Shameem Black concludes her analysis of Amitav Ghosh as follows:

As Ghosh’s writing asks how fiction in English might accommodate the multiplicity of multilingual and antilingual experience, it copes with the borders between languages by divesting English of exclusive aesthetic privilege. The flattened language of *The Glass Palace* eschews the hierarchies of dialect, favouring instead the visual techniques of modernist photography, and the crowded selves of *The Hungry Tide* forge a compromise between the utopianism of the unspoken and fallible speech of translation. These aesthetic renunciations, paradoxically, expand the capacity of English to represent non-English worlds of experience. They testify to possible strategies for lives lived across the borders of language. (*Fiction Across Borders* 199)

In the context of rising political, social and religious unrest, where the world is torn up by terrorism, casteism, regionalism and violence, a study of the novels of Amitav Ghosh which envisages a democratic and borderless world of peace, fraternity and love with “scrupulous attention” paid to the words used in writing, will be highly relevant. In the preface to *Incendiary Circumstances*, Amitav Ghosh echoes his statement on terrorism and its violent repression from an earlier essay “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi” that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984. He draws attention towards the responsibility of the writer to take into account the influence words have in the incendiary circumstances of the contemporary world. He says:


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The deadly logic of terrorism is precisely to invite repression: it is thus that it brings into being the social gulf on which its existence is predicated. To write carelessly can all too easily add to the problem by appearing to endorse either terrorism or violent repression. In such incendiary circumstances words can cost lives, and it is only appropriate that those who deal in them should pay scrupulous attention to what they say. (ix)

It has become one of the trademarks of his writing both fiction and non-fiction, not to narrate matters into spectacles by being too polemical and provocative.

He has approached various themes in his novels in generically very inventive and heterogeneous ways of narration for “subversively manipulating literary genres stemming from Western modernity to go with his aim of dismantling discursive constructions that the same modernity stands on” (The Ethics of Representation 3-4). The novelist focuses his attention towards crucial contemporary issues and concerns through the depiction of side-tracked, ignored groups of society or dispossessed people (such as migrants, prostitutes, convicts, the disabled and the illiterate), thereby bringing them to the centre of focus. The fact that the aspects of the marginal groups are deemed unpleasant by the dominant group seeks to distance itself from such facts of life through oppression and rejection. Such reminders of the darker side of human existence constantly lurk in the novels of Amitav Ghosh and are closely related to the novelist’s aim of getting the misplaced people out of the oblivion.

To fix Amitav Ghosh in one particular country or culture will be misleading as he has lived in different locations of the world. His life has been somewhat nomadic. This rootless existence is reflected in his novels as the characters spend most of their lives on the move. A visiting professor at various universities like University of Virginia, Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania and American University in Cairo, Amitav Ghosh has also held the title of Distinguished Professor in the Department of Comparative Literature at Queen’s College, City University of New York. Currently he is a Visiting professor in the Department of English and American Literature at Harvard.

Critics regard him as one of the new generation of cosmopolitan intellectuals writing in English, emerging from the Indian literary scene with a distinctive and
confident voice. Apart from being an acclaimed Indian English writer, Amitav Ghosh is well known as an anthropologist, a journalist and above all, as a globe trotter. He has proved his ability in writing on varied topics like deconstruction of binaries of purity/impurity, man/machine, emplacement/displacement and so on in The Circle of Reason, the vision of a borderless world as in The Shadow Lines, science fiction as in The Calcutta Chromosome, re-inscribing history as in The Glass Palace, and ecological concerns in The Hungry Tide. River of Smoke, his latest novel, was published in 2011. Amitav Ghosh continues his interest in exploring characters from different cultures and discovers further links and perspectives in the recurring themes of colonization. Opium and the drug trade forms an ongoing link that ties together the histories of several countries. The exploration of this segment of history requires more consideration than is possible in the present study.

Amitav Ghosh, the globe trotter possesses an absorbing ear to imbibe varieties of languages. The use of such varieties enriches the final outcome of his fiction. As NGugi Wa Thiongo has stressed the importance of language in society, “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 4). The significance of language in novels is underscored by Bakhtin also in his essay “Discourse in the Novel” when he defines novel as “a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices artistically organised” (The Dialogic Imagination 262). Heteroglossia which means “social diversity of speech types,” (263) 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 Amitav Ghosh’s characters do adding to the variety of style which makes 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. (*The Dialogic Imagination* 332)

The present study is based on the assumption that the gradual striking at systems of thoughts brings subversion of hierarchies and despotic authorities. Subversion takes place in steady but ongoing speed to call into question the hitherto privileged entities. The fiction of Amitav Ghosh veers around the general idea that truth and authenticity are lying somewhere behind or amidst hegemonic discourses that are opaque and elliptical. The aim of the novelist is always to find a way of resisting, or opening up these discourses that tend to eclipse the Other and the subaltern. He does so by empowering his major and minor characters to build a polyphonic discourse in the novel playing the crescendo of disparate ideologies and principles with no interference or dominance of the narrator.

At this point, it is useful to briefly list certain elementary aspects of Bakhtinian theories used as a background of this thesis. Polyphony is very prominent part of Bakhtinian theory of dismantling hierarchal structures. It is the Russian Linguistic-philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin’s crucial concept which broadly refers to “plurality of voices.” Originally he argued that it is only in Dostoevsky’s novels that polyphony is realized. The American Jewish writer Saul Bellow’s essay embodies the distinctive polyphonic quality in a novel. It seems to me that Bellow also believes what Bakhtin considers as prototypically polyphonic aspects of Dostoevsky’s writings:

> It becomes art when the views most opposite to the author’s own are allowed to exist in full strength. Without this a novel of ideas is mere self-indulgence, and didacticism is simply axe-grinding. The opposites must be free to range themselves against each other, and they must be passionately expressed on both sides. (Bellow 220)

Bellow and Bakhtin emphasize the distinctiveness of a character strongly expressed and his/her viewpoint is allowed to exist as opposed to the author’s own. What is momentous for Bakhtin is the coexistence of narrator, who holds the closest
position to author, and character(s). Bakhtin also emphasizes the significance of distance between narrator (or author) and a character.

In the development of the ethical import of the concept of polyphony, “distance” is the hinge upon which everything phenomenologically observable reveals an intersubjective plane of interaction upon which the author’s characters appear to have a consciousness distinct from the author himself: they lie at a distance, have a position of their own. Distance allows them to speak in their own “voice,” to utter their own “word.” (Poole 118)

A narrator and a character must keep a distance, that is, they must not merge into the single voice. It is instructive to point out here that Bakhtin’s theory is influenced by a German philosopher Max Scheler’s theory of sympathy and empathy. The following words, both of which are quoted from Bakhtin, are significant in this sense, “I empathize actively into an individuality and, consequently, I do not lose myself completely, nor my unique place outside it, even for a moment.” (Toward a Philosophy of the Act 15) and he says,

But pure empathizing as such is impossible. If I actually lost myself in the other (instead of two participants there would be one – an impoverishment of Being), i.e., if I ceased to be unique, then this moment of my not-being cannot become a moment in the being of consciousness – it would simply not exist for me, i.e., being would not be accomplished through me at that moment. Passive empathizing, being-possessed, losing oneself – these have nothing in common with the answerable act/deed of self-abstracting or self-renunciation. (Toward a Philosophy of the Act 16)

Here Bakhtin clearly deals with the problem of “empathy” or “sympathy.” The distinction between these related terms is rather controversial but I would like to focus upon what he defines as “pure empathizing” and “passive empathizing.” Although narrator must empathize with or even sympathize towards a character to embody polyphony, they must also be different from each other. Bakhtin seems to argue that both narrator and character must keep their unique respective self or sense of identities.
This leads us to the crucial role of the narrator who shows empathy towards the character but at the same time he/she must keep a dialogic relation and there must be distance between them. The narrator and the character are independent from each other and both of them keep their own identity. My concern is to show that these issues are embodied in most of the novels of Amitav Ghosh. Through the timely foregrounding and working of the Bakhtinian concept of “polyphony”, this study enlightens the reader on its significance for the distinctive modes of characterization in each novel. The distinctive mode of characterization is interwoven with the narrative structure and the novel’s ideology. The nature of novels, Lukacs suggests, is not “homogeneously organic and stable” but “heterogenously contingent and discrete”, (76) assuming plural voices of independent characters. Friedrich Engels also argues that the more deeply the author’s own opinions are hidden, the better the novel is as a work of art (Marx-Engels Correspondence 1888). Bellow presents a similar view, declaring that a novel of ideas can be art only when characters’ views become independent from that of the author.

Bakhtin seems to agree with the aforementioned views of prose fiction. From a linguistic point of view, he also regards Dostoevsky as “the creator of the polyphonic novel” (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 7). He argues that Dostoevsky’s characters are not voiceless slaves “but free people, capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him, and even of rebelling against him” (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 6). In his works, voice and consciousness are independent and never absorbed into the absolute, authorial voice. In a similar manner, the fiction of Amitav Ghosh establishes articulative characters by voicing contradictory viewpoints and ideologies.

As will become evident in the subsequent chapters, it seems that especially the fiction of Amitav Ghosh with its polyphonic and cross-cultural dialogic and heteroglossic representation is a useful forum for engaging in a politics of subversion, thereby deliberately distorting language. It is done through the timely oscillation between different registers of language to ensure the interruption of the power of the standard language which seeks to curb the linguistic variegation. Amitav Ghosh’s narratives shatter the linguistic totalities through their differing registers, maintaining an open-ended ambivalence that both dismantles and re-constructs various totalizing discourses. The writing of Amitav Ghosh, I shall argue throughout this study, can be
realised as a practical example of the coming together of deconstruction and Bakhtinian theories. I hope to show that the aporia, or gap, between the registers he enacts opens up a dimension of alterity and transcendence that carries multiplicity and cross-cultural significance of identities.

Dialogism is central to Bakhtin’s theoretical construct. In Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, Bakhtin speaks of works as being either comparatively monologic’ or dialogic. The Bedford Glossary analyses these theoretical concepts of Bakhtin as follows:

A monologic work is one that is clearly dominated by a single controlling voice or discourse even though it may contain characters representing a multitude of viewpoints. Contrary voices are subordinated to authorial voice, which is usually, though not always, representative of the dominant or official ideology of the author’s culture. A dialogic work, by contrast, is one that permits numerous voices or discourses to emerge and to engage in dialogue with one another...Bakhtin argued that no work can be completely monologic, because the narrator, no matter how authorial and representative of the official culture cannot avoid representing differing and even contrary viewpoints in the process of relating the thoughts and remarks of the diverse group of literary characters that inevitably populate the incredible fictional world. These other voices, which make any work polyphonic to some degree, inevitably disrupt the authoritative voice, even though it may remain dominant. Thus, for Bakhtin the monologic/dialogic opposition was not an absolute: some works are more monologic, others more dialogic. (Murfin 86)

The monologic works are dominated by the author’s single voice and one-sided view. In this type of novel, the author’s likes and dislikes, and sympathies and ironies toward particular characters, may be evident to readers. The dialogic novel is the ideal novel where multiple views are allowed to exist. Originally, Bakhtin in Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics had claimed that Dostoevsky is the first novelist to achieve such multiplicity defined as “polyphony.” However, polyphony is not exclusive to Dostoevsky’s novels. Bakhtin in The Dialogic Imagination includes the
novels of other writers such as Dickens as a type of polyphonic text and goes so far as to distinguish the language of novel (polyphonic) from that of poetry (monologic). Moreover, whether polyphony is exclusive to novel is doubtful. From the linguistic point of view, Geyer-Ryan and Wales argue that even poetry can be polyphonic.

Michael J. McDowell, in his essay “The Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight” notes:

The ideal form to represent reality, to Bakhtin is a dialogic form, one in which multiple voices or point of view interact. Monological forms, in contrast, encourage the singular speaking subject to suppress whatever doesn’t fit his or her ideology...An application of dialogics to landscape literature can open up a text to enable an analysis of ecological relationships among all landscape components including humans. Dialogics helps first by placing an emphasis on contradictory voices, rather than focusing mainly upon the authoritative voice of the narrator (qtd. in The Ecocriticism Reader 373).

A literary work is a cite for dialogic interaction of multiple voices which helps the writer to represent a variety of socio-ideological positions. The character of a person emerges in the course of a dialogue and is composed of languages from different social contexts:

Each utterance...whether in actual life or as represented in literature owes its precise inflection and meaning to a number of attendant factors- the specific social situation in which it is spoken, the relation of its speaker to an actual or anticipated listener and the relation of the utterance to the prior utterance to which it is (explicitly or implicitly), a response (Abrams 63)

Bakhtin defines the novel as a diversity of social speech types, sometimes even diversity of languages and a diversity of individual voices artistically organized (The Dialogic Imagination 262). The novel orchestrates all its theme, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by differing individual voices. (The Dialogic Imagination 263)
Seen against the background of dialogism, Amitav Ghosh’s narratives imply that the delineation of diverse linguistic patterns enables to project the changes experienced through disruption of norms of standard language. It also affects the dominance of ideologies contained in those norms. The discussion in Chapter Three attempts to know the relationship between knowledge and language. The argument is based on the philosophical assumption that in attempting to know the world we simultaneously change it by projecting onto it meanings conveyed by language and narration. It is true in most of the narratives of Amitav Ghosh, where the ultimate experience of truth is often represented by silence, which can never be gained through knowing, that is, through language. Silence also represents the gap between the world and the words that are used to narrate it. For instance, in the historical records (written by the Western historians) as demonstrated in many novels of Amitav Ghosh, much about the subalterns remained unvoiced and unrecorded because the dominating western or elitist ideology does not match the reality of the marginalized people. On another level, those left outside the governing history find it problematic to describe themselves and their realities through a language that is linked to discursive domination through imperial and political practices.

Amitav Ghosh, who writes in English, tries to find ways for narrating the realities of people who are outside Western and even Indian elitist ideology through the language of this ideology. He aims at subversion of the political and cultural power-relationships carried by language. However, every kind of language, ultimately, can be polyphonic in Bakhtin’s terms, because language is “populated-overpopulated- with the intentions of others” (The Dialogic Imagination 294). Every utterance exists by reflecting other utterances, whether they are past or future. The current utterance is countered against the past one and is, in turn, targeted against the future response. Volosinov stresses this intertextual aspect of language, “a continuous generative process implemented in the social-verbal interaction of speakers” (98).

Bakhtin also opines that in collective discourse, language can polyphonically represent unanimous opinion in society. Although language has a polyphonic element in a broad sense and, therefore, all literary works might be defined as polyphonic, Dostoevsky’s or Dickens’s writing could be defined as prototypically polyphonic. The question is how such polyphonic writing is different from the monologic from a linguistic, stylistic, narratological point of view. Almost all novels contain characters’
dialogue or thoughts, so they allow different views to exist in some sense. However, a text is not polyphonic just because the characters’s speeches and thoughts are there. What makes prose polyphonic is, Bakhtin argues, “the dialogic angle” at which the authorial and figural voices are “juxtaposed or counterposed in the work” (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 182). In other words, the manner in which the views of the author and the characters are presented is significant in discussing polyphonic element of texts. Polyphony is, therefore, closely related to the question of focalization: who sees, thinks, feels and so on.

Bakhtin’s views can be classified into three kinds of discourse: first is the direct, unmediated discourse directed exclusively toward its referential object as an expression of the speaker’s ultimate semantic authority; the second discourse is the objectified discourse of a represented person and the third discourse is orientated towards someone else’s discourse (double-voiced discourse). The first classification is equal to the narrator’s words. The second type is the direct quotation of characters’ speech. The third kind is the mediation of the first type and the second type; where two or more voices appear: the voice of the narrator and the voice of the character(s). The third classification is further divided into sub-categories: stylization, hidden internal polemic, parody etc. These categories have relevance to the linguistic classification of direct and indirect speech. (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 199)

In addition to this, another significant element of the structure of novel which is also examined in the study is the narrative technique of focalization extensively exploited by the novelist to achieve his aim of subverting the dominating authorities and hierarchies. Focalization is explored in Chapter Five which attempts to prove the novelist’s stance of dismantling the categories of concentration hitherto given to the Western ideology and the rich and the educated people. It is through focalization that the subalterns like Deeti, Kalua and jahaz bhai are given utmost significance.

To further this argument, let us first discuss this theoretical basis of focalization. There are two alternatives available as the agent of Implied Author-Narrator and Character. The agents do not always mean those who speak in place of Implied Author. The Implied Author can leave to the agents the roles of not only speaking but also seeing, thinking, feeling and so on. Many studies of “point of view” in the past, however, have discussed such different questions of “who speaks”, “who
sees”, etc. in the same category. Brooks & Warren, Friedman, Booth and Romberg are some examples of confusion. For instance, discussing literary technical invention instigated by Henry James, Friedman deals with the two questions of “who speaks” and “who focalizes?” under the single term of “point of view.” Booth’s confusion is to regard the centre of consciousness as a narrator. Therefore, according to his argument, the focalizer (the holder of the point of view) is always coincident with the speaker. This contradicts Genette’s distinction between “voice” or “who is the narrator?” and “mood” or “who sees?” (186) While recognizing the distinction between the two areas, Rimmon still argues that in third person narrative context, absolute separation of focalizer (character) from voice (narrator) is impossible because it is the narrator who deliberately restricts the focalizer’s (character) view.

Genette attempts to solve this confusion by distinguishing between seeing and speaking, first and foremost, and by employing the term “focalization”, which is “the relationship between “the vision”, the agent that sees, and that which is seen” (Mieke Bal 104). The “agent”, whether a narrator or a character, can convey the vision of others through his/her own words. This is the distinction which is also explored by F.K. Stanzel under the terms “reflector” and “narrator.”

Developing the concept of focalization, Bal coins the term focalizer, which is defined as the subject of focalization or “the point from which the elements are viewed” (104). She also employs the term focalized to explain the object viewed by the focalizer. The inclusion of an ideological aspect is essential for discussing the degree of polyphony, because the number of focalizers, and the extent to which each focalizer produces significant world-views, will be a signpost in identifying the polyphonic element. However, what has been generally neglected is that there may be an embedded focalizer or focalized, which means, in each focalizer-focalized relationship, there may be other focalizer-focalized relationships. This argument is taken up in the fifth chapter of the thesis.

Bakhtin identifies polyphony as a special feature of the novel which can be seen as instrumental in triggering the act of focalization. He traces polyphony back to its carnivallistic 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. 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 pattern, 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 (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 7).

David Lodge in his essay “After Bakhtin”, while analyzing Bakhtin’s literary theory observes:

The genres canonised by traditional poetics- tragedy, epic and lyric-are monologic: they employ a single style and express a single world view. The discourse of the novel in contrast is an orchestration of diverse discourses culled from heterogeneous sources, oral and written conveying different ideological positions which are put in play without ever being subjected to totalising judgment or interpretation…Originally Bakhtin attributed the discovery of this discursive polyphony to Dostoevsky. Later he came to think that it was inherent in novel as a literary form, and he traced it back historically to the comic and satiric writing of the classical period…and to the carnival tradition in popular culture that sustained an unofficial resistance to the monologic discourses of medieval Christendom. (Fabb et al. 92)

Bakhtin asserts:

In a polyphonic novel, 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 a mouthpiece for the author’s voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work: it sounds as it were, alongside the author’s word and in special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 7).

The narrators and characters achieve independence in the novel through heteroglossia. Diglossia is a language situation in which two markedly divergent varieties, each with its own set of social functions, co-exist as standard throughout a community (Crystal 43). Heteroglossia which according to Bakhtin is “differentiated speech,” is the key term for describing the complex stratification of language into genre, register, sociolect and dialect and the mutual interanimation of these forms. It does not simply mean the variety of different languages which occurs in everyday life, but also the entry of these languages into literary texts (Vice 18). Internal stratification of language, social heteroglossia and the variety of individual voices in it are essential prerequisites for the authentic novelistic prose. Bakhtin observes:

Heteroglossia enters the novel through authorial speech, speeches of narrators, inserted genres and speeches of characters. Each of them permits a wide variety of links and interrelationships. Each generation at each social level has its own language; moreover every age group has its own vocabulary, its own particular accentual system that, in their turn vary depending on social level, academic institution and other stratifying factors...It is even possible to have a family jargon with its special vocabulary and unique accentual system. (The Dialogic Imagination 290-291)

At any given moment languages of various epochs and periods of socio-ideological life cohabit with one another. Language is heteroglot from top to bottom. The language of heteroglossia manifests itself through polyphony and carnivalisation.

Another linguistic device which is relevant to Amitav Ghosh’s fiction is polyglossia. The substitution of the individualized language of the novelist for the style of the novel distorts the very essence of stylistics of the novel. Bakhtin argues:
Such substitution inevitably leads to the selection from the novel of only those elements that can be fitted within the frame of a single language system and that express, directly and without mediation, an authorial individuality of language. The whole of the novel and the specific tasks involved in constructing this whole out of the heteroglot, multi-voiced, multi-styled and often multi-languaged elements remain outside the boundaries of such a study (The Dialogic Imagination 264-265).

Diglossia, heteroglossia and polyphony are some of the conspicuous linguistic innovations employed by Amitav Ghosh in his novels. Ashcroft et. al. observe:

The world language called English is a continuum of “intersections” in which the speaking habits in various communities has intervened to reconstruct the language. This reconstruction occurs in two ways: on the one hand regional English varieties may introduce words which become familiar to all English speakers, and on the other, the varieties themselves produce national and regional peculiarities which distinguish them from others forms of English (Ashcroft et. al. 39).

Amitav Ghosh resorts to the technique of switching between two or more codes which is termed as code-switching, as a part of subverting authoritative language. This technique also inscribes alterity and installs cultural distinctiveness of his characters. David Crystal argues:

Switching between languages is extremely common and takes many forms. A long narrative may switch from one language to the other. Sentence may alternate. A sentence may begin in one language and finish in another. Or phrases from both languages may succeed each other in apparently random order...When the speakers cannot express themselves adequately in one language, they switch on to the other to make good the deficiency. The switch between languages can signal the speaker’s attitude towards the listener-friendly irritated, distant, ironical, jocular and so on (Crystal 365).

Words and phrases from the local and regional dialects of different languages like Hindi, Bengali, Arabic, which appear frequently in Amitav Ghosh’s fiction makes
his novelistic prose polyglossic. Instead of having one focal point and one plot with a
beginning, middle and end; a multiplicity of plots with multiple voices of multiple
narrators characterize his novels. Brinda Bose observes:

> Amitav Ghosh must today be considered at the forefront of those
> writers who chronologically followed Rushdie in the history of Indian
> novel in English but emerged with such distinctive voice that today it
> may arguably be said that it is a voice that may well sustain itself
> beyond its predecessors. (Bose 25)

Amitav 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 consciousness with equal rights and each with its own
world” (Bakhtin, 1984:6) populates his novels. Different characters cum-narrators
take up their roles in novels 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 narratives. Thus, variety and diversity co-exist
in the woven texture of the novels. Each character establishes his or her individuality
through a special way of narration. A conglomeration of narratives of varied narrators
and avid narratees imparts uniqueness to his novels.

Some novels like *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *The Calcutta
Chromosome* include many narrators narrating different stories to other characters
with each character having his/her own version of the story and therefore, there can
not be a real story. If it is a true story it ceases to be a story. The quest for truth is a
never-ending 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/she should start his/her own quest for truth afresh. Story-telling has always been a
part of human life. Every time when it is retold, it transmits the ideologies of the
story-teller. Along with that, the linguistic register of each story-teller varies from
person to person. This type of narration provides life to the novel as it is an accumulation of narrated stories. 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. The Indian oral tradition surely has inspired Amitav Ghosh to adopt polyphonic method in his novels productively.

Amitav Ghosh uses these multiple voices to aim at achieving the metamorphosis of characters. He seems to believe that what is told by the narrator is not always monologic. It will be shown in the subsequent chapters that a character’s consciousness can be represented while the narrator’s voice is retained. His fiction points to the fact that the rise of subordinate voices should also be regarded as one aspect of polyphony. He rarely takes sides for varied issues taken up in his novels. This advocacy, of course, is opted by his characters but, interestingly, then there is always another character, as central in the story, pitching for the other side. This makes the manifestation of polyphony very prominent in his novels. And so, in the spirit of postmodernism, he weaves ideas, and counter-ideas; perceptions and counter-perceptions; juxtaposing myth and science, belief and scepticism, progress/survival and environmentalism, the rustic and the refined, and so on. Piyali in *The Hungry Tide* humanizes the tiger which is killing people and urges Kanai to take radical steps for its safety. The novelist puts the views of both these characters with equal emphasis leaving the readers to decide whom they should support.

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Amitav Ghosh makes use of the polyphonic method of narration through major narrators like Antar, Murugan, Urmila Roy and Sonali Das. The computer Ava is also instrumental in providing most of the crucial information necessary for the development of the novel and hence can be viewed as a narrator. The remarkable difference is made obvious 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 novel, renowned as a science fiction and a mystery thriller, tries to rewrite the Western medical history. Amitav Ghosh focuses upon the intuitive insights of the subalterns of India and provides the possibility of an alternative subaltern history. Murugan, the researcher in the novel is convinced that their history has been conveniently erased from the scribal records of Western medical science to instate Dr. Ronald Ross on the pedestal of glory. It is further explained in detail in Chapter Three.
Postmodernism celebrates polyphonic novels as they consist of independent voices which are equal subjects of their own right and do not serve the ideological position of the author. Within the novel, Bakhtin maintains that one finds the site of resistance to authority and the place where cultural, and potentially political, change can take place. The deliberate ambiguity of unprivileged stance of the novelist towards any character or his/her views gives way to the polyphonic novel, in which narratological and character voices are set free to speak subversively or shockingly, but without the writer of the text stepping between character and reader.

Postmodernism rejects boundaries and binaries and emphasizes parody, pastiche, and playfulness. Amitav Ghosh disavows “universal” historical narratives and instead focuses on fragments of human experience that “have been occluded from the historical record.” Mondal compares the generic multiplicity (science fiction, detective fiction, thriller, and modes of writing such as historiography, ethnography, bildungsroman and scientific discourse) found in Amitav Ghosh’s texts with what Steven Connor has identified as an inherent interdisciplinary within postmodernism. (Contemporary World Writers 21)

Deconstruction is relevant in the context of Amitav Ghosh’s fiction which is in the same vein subversive as it undermines the traditional valorization of one of the two entities of binary antithesis like conformity / nonconformity, solemnity / humour, order / disorder, permanence / volatility, eternal / transient, presence / absence, emplacement / displacement, finality (consummation) / irresolution, regularity / irregularity, concord / discord, serious / playful, deep / superficial and nature / culture. The discussion in the subsequent chapters endeavours to bring a new perspective of deconstruction to the understanding of Amitav Ghosh’s fiction.

The dynamics of subversion work in abundance in Amitav Ghosh’s fiction. He firmly believes in the postmodern features like the impossibility of fixity in language, celebration of the fragmentation, multiplicity, plurality and hybridity, struggle in presenting the unrepresentable, deliberate representation of the illogical, irrational, unrealistic and incoherent portrayal and incorporation of the themes of diaspora, travelling, memories, mourning, melancholy, trauma of nostalgia, and arbitrariness of borders, absurdity of colonial authority and knowledge in his novels. The purpose of this research is to unravel subversive aspects present in some of his selected novels through the presentation of the theoretical concepts of polyphony and deconstruction of binaries as modes of transgression and of inquisition.
Amitav Ghosh himself admits a strong presence of the legacy of the Bengal Renaissance in his works. The modern literary and artistic tradition of Bengal seems to have an indelible mark on the novelist’s humanism. Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray are two influential figures of such tradition. Amitav Ghosh’s troubled relationship to modernity and humanism reflects Tagore’s impression and his inclination towards humanism (which is present in the innocence of childhood, distinctive individuality, his firm belief in hope and destiny and affirmation of positive social values) has representative impulse of Satyajit Ray. *The Calcutta Chromosome* is influenced by the popular fiction of the 1930s and 1940s, that is, ghost stories, science fiction, fantastical novels, and detective fiction as well as social realism of Bengali literary icons Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (1878-1938) and Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay (1894-1950).

Amitav Ghosh’s close ties with the Subaltern Studies group which rejects grand narratives of Indian nationalism, suspects the state, and affirms the subaltern, have relevance to his works. The deliberation in the next chapter explores this relevance. Mondal feels Amitav Ghosh’s “interests in individuality, experience, self-fashioning and (auto)biography perhaps owe something to V.S. Naipaul(30). Leela Gandhi during her lecture at the English Department of La Trobe University on “Indo-Anglian Fiction: Writing India, Elite Aesthetics, and the Rise of the ‘Stephanian’ Novel” opines, “Ghosh’s bildungsromans seriously negotiate the intellectual content of his literary inheritance, traversing unusual and decisively non-metropolitan cultural circuits between, for instance, India and Egypt.”

For Amitav Ghosh, language is a division that separates human beings. Mondal equates Amitav Ghosh’s strategy with Derrida’s philosophy because both of them do not believe in “metaphysics of presence,” that is, meaning can be grasped which is present in language. Their point is that the meaning and truth of experience can never be fully represented because the language, by which it is mediated, is unstable and has multiplicity of meanings. Murugan voices it when he says, “to know something is to change it” (*Contemporary World Writers* 58).

In *The Circle of Reason*, Amitav Ghosh proves that the opposite side of the reason is as essential as the reason itself, that is, desire, hope, despair, madness, and obsession. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Amitav Ghosh is engaged with the grand
narrative of Western scientific discovery and subjects it to post-colonial scrutiny. The novelist actually shows how the inherent power of the people at periphery and their knowledges trouble the very concept of discovery itself. Mondal opines that the demands to open up a space for subaltern pasts in historical archives which records observations, opinions and conclusions of colonial doctors, linguists, anthropologists, historians, surveyors, civil servants and others "compose[s] a particular picture of the colony." (Contemporary World Writers 146)

Mondal shows the argument of Robert Dixon who argues that Amitav Gosh’s texts float free of any affiliation either to liberal humanism or postmodernism. He, on the contrary, strongly feels the possibility of the novelist’s “commitment to both” (171). Mondal gives central argument of his book with characteristic “ambivalent tension between the modes of liberal humanism and those of postmodernism” (Contemporary World Writers 171). Amitav Ghosh’s fiction calls for the opening of the channels of communication among the segregated communities, ideologies and systems of thought.

Amitav Ghosh employs various techniques in his novels like magic realism, irony, wordplay, mythology, elaborate allegories and layers of interconnected stories. With the myriad characters in his novels, Amitav Ghosh presents various points of view in narration without any forcible or absolute judgement of the narrator, each character and the narrator enjoys a distinct voice which creates a musical crescendo in the final outcome of the novel. In most of his fiction, Amitav Ghosh seeks to reveal the gaps and fissures of modernity’s metaphysic in western scientific rationale and opens a space for other knowledge systems and other way of thinking and beliefs.

The politics of subversion undermines the hegemonic discourses and languages by the inclusion of dialects, oral tradition and songs for expression rather than the usage of standard language(s). Amitav Ghosh points to various techniques of subversion found in one form or the other in his novels. The author reveals the need to open up new avenues of thought to celebrate the multiplicity and plural voices and manifestation of polyphony and the possibility of deconstructive reading in the portrayal of characters, narration and situations in the novels. He does so to actualize the process of struggle within the structures of belief and knowledge that calls for change. He brings the attention of his readers towards the play of democratic voices in
his fiction. He persuades the readers about his judicious use of the mode of subversion in most of his fiction. Subversion, in his novels, is not dismissal or rejection at the utmost; it is in fact, for persuasion. Thus, there is a subtle persuasive politics embedded inside his texts to debunk the hitherto acknowledged binaries.

The fiction of Amitav Ghosh endeavours to call into question every type of rigidity in the systems of thoughts and knowledges that exterminates the essence of human life. It accentuates the spirit of struggle of the migrated, the homeless or the neglected to make the most of the given opportunities. It embraces the marginalized and achieves promise, potentiality and realisation for rejuvenating the age-old structures set by the society. Amitav Ghosh strives for innovation and novelty through his novels.

Being an anthropologist, Amitav Ghosh draws on the stories that people tell. In different novels, this fascination takes different forms. The Circle of Reason witnesses people of Ras sharing their past and present in the form of stories and find a feasible medium to do away with their boredom and burden of migration. The novelist always dives for a sagacious exploration into the local reality (through stories, folk songs, myths) which seems to subvert the official religious and national versions of history. In The Hungry Tide, the tide country people follow an oral epic narrative of origins which they regard as a kind of local religion worshipping a Goddess called Bon Bibi. The incantation to the goddess is strongly inflected by Islamic influences. This kind of syncretism is very crucial to the understanding of Amitav Ghosh’s subversion of the narrow-minded outlook that the society of modern India still carries. The oeuvre of Amitav Ghosh points towards transcendence of culturally constructed differences. Like a sincere writer, he shows his responsibility in informing and commenting on politics, wars, economy, societal barriers and worldly ills.

Amitav Ghosh uses the element of comic in Sea of Poppies which may be seen as a continuation of the tradition of Bengali humour and also as a means of foregrounding the flexibility and resourcefulness of the common person during repressive formations. Baboo Nob Kissin, Zachary, Mrs. Burnham and Paulette are among those characters through which the novelist exploits this element to the most. Baboo Nob Kissin’s consideration of Zachary as an incarnation of Lord Krishna
Rollason reviews *Sea of Poppies* and comments on the spirit and the inner strength of the migrants, “Amitav Ghosh...succeeds...in pushing his fictional practice into new dimensions of formal and linguistic experimentation while, most importantly, telling a moving story that embodies the capacity of ordinary folk to survive and celebrate despite the oppressive incursions of power.” He concludes with his observation of noticing in the novel the novelist’s “constant human commitment” (3).

*The Hungry Tide* instigates national awareness about the history of violence writ all over the countenance of the Sunderbans, the landscape of the novel as significant as the characters. Amitav Ghosh himself emphasizes the importance of the landscape in one of his essays, “A novel...must always be set somewhere: it must have its setting, and within the evolution of the narrative this setting must, classically, play a part almost as important as those of the characters themselves” (“The March of the Novel through History: the Testimony of my Grandfather’s Bookcase”). The novelist underscores the ongoing exploitation of the place. The “Author’s note” in the novel, his interviews, essays and articles from the time of its publication witness the political streaks in writing the novel.

Through the underpinning of the plight of the flora and fauna, the poor, the novelist highlights the tragedy and hypocrisy (of the concerned officials and government bodies related to Sunderbans who are neither for Nature nor for human beings) inherent in the conservation efforts in the Sunderbans. The novel problematizes the anxiety between and within human communities, their respective relations with the natural world and the reality of Nature in changing and is at the same time changed by humanity. Water emerges as a powerful agency which is able to rewrite the social matrix of the Sunderbans subverting the binaries of the rich, the educated and the privileged who are seen to be at the mercy of the knowledge that the poor, the illiterate and the unprivileged people have about Nature and the islands.

While discussing his passion for writing, Amitav Ghosh tells Beth Jones in an interview, “For me, home is my desk...Writing is home for me.” He also comments on the significant role of a character with his/her relation to the author,
It sometimes happens that your characters take over without you really being aware of it... I do think that people challenge themselves more when they are away from home. Being cut loose, coming adrift, that suddenly makes you have to define yourself, decide 'this is what I am.' In fact, one of the things which inspired the entire trilogy is something quite startling which I discovered in Mauritius. People would often introduce another person to me and say, 'We are ship brothers,' and I would say, 'What does that mean?' and they would say, 'Well his great-great-great-great grandfather and my great-great-great-great-grandfather travelled on the same ship from India.' So, there was a sense in which they had this sort of community which emerged from the belly of the ship - a family not out of blood, but out of sympathies. And that was something which really intrigued and excited me because that's exactly the kind of community that I myself am drawn towards - a community of experience.

He continues sharing his appreciation of those people who know how to find the sources of joy in their dreary life:

What’s important is what people make of things. The poorest place in the world must be this forest area called the Sundarbans, which is a delta region in Bengal, which is where I am from and I've spent a lot of time there and I tell you I've never been in a place where people laugh so readily and smile so often and yet they lead lives of such utter deprivation and poverty. But they don't think of it as such. Which is not to romanticise poverty... The most optimistic people are in places like India. And why is that? I think the difference is in having a community. I think if there are people there to share your difficulties it's easier to overcome them.

Amitav Ghosh reveals the source of his happiness which is no longer fame and glory, “Prizes don't mean so much as you get older - they are like having a sunny day. Wonderful to have them, but you know you'd still be doing the same thing without them.” But rather his family, “travelling with my kids gives me back a sense of magic
and wonder because it’s so exciting to see things through their eyes” and, of course, his home (United Books interview).

In a review of *The Glass Palace*, Pankaj Mishra describes Amitav Ghosh as one of the few post-colonial writers “to have expressed in his work a developing awareness of the aspirations, defeats and disappointments of colonized peoples as they figure out their place in the world” (“There’ll Always Be an England in India”). In “Acknowledgements” to *The Imam and the Indian* (2002-x), Amitav Ghosh mentions his own writerly “interest in patterns of work” and foregrounds the presence of that premise in *The Circle of Reason* and *The Glass Palace*. He extensively uses weaving and gardening as themes in these novels while his later works dwell on different activities as timbering, oil production and photography.

The fiction of Amitav Ghosh lends a privileged position to the marginalized subalterns of India. The delineation of silent, discreet, thoughtful and innate operations carried out by Mangala and Laakhan in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is reminiscent of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s representation of voicelessness in her revolutionary essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Focusing on the subalterns, Spivak highlights the fact that the subalterns cannot speak because their words cannot be properly interpreted (338). When the subalterns suffering from acute syphilitic paresis gathered around Mangala in supplication to get a miraculous cure from the deadly disease, the conscience of Dr. Farley, the representative of the Western rational and elite mind 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” (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 126). It is his Western consciousness that shaped his conviction that the subalterns are ignorant, illiterate and superstitious. Their ability to provide medical cure to a terrible disease is beyond his imagination. But Dr. Farley was proved wrong when he witnessed the success in their experiment to find out the malaria parasite. Yet another pioneering discovery made by them was that malaria, in its turn, is a cure for syphilitic dementia, which showed that they were far more advanced in their intuitive knowledge than their Western counterparts.

The oral narration is embedded in Indian literary tradition. Indian epics like the *Mahabharta*, and the *Ramyana*, the *Puranas*, the *Panchathantra* stories, the
Jataka tales, the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads are all written in the form of transcripts of orally narrated stories. The Indian literary tradition and cultural philosophy inherent in Amitav Ghosh inspired him to give expression to his fictional works in the best way for emphasizing the Indian culture and hence there is an ample use of oral narration in his novels and travelogues. The novelist resorts to localized techniques, thereby trying to rejuvenate his own cultural heritage and traditional practices of writing. The narrator of The Shadow Lines relies on the oral narratives to which he had listened during his childhood days and during the stage of growing up. The narrator does not elicit information of Tridib’s death from just one source but draws on the narrative voices of those who are interrelated either through familial bonds or through friendship.

The inclusion of mythic or legendary material drawn from local written or cultural tradition has become a part of Amitav Ghosh’s fiction. Amitav Ghosh, by introducing newly created myths and legends in his fictional narratives, interrogates the assumption of the “rational linear narratives and encloses it within an indigenous metatext” (Ashcroft et al. 133). Myths and legends are the distinctive features of the national and local cultures and are the collective forms by which people identify and articulate their discreteness. A.S.Rao states that Nachiketa Bose in The Circle of Reason is the mythical pre-figuration of the mythical Nachiketa (38). Nachiketa’s entry into the world of Yama to obey the dictum of his father is reiterated in the novel when Alu lives for four days face to face with death under the collapsed building, The Star, “he lay flat on the floor with a huge block of concrete just inches from his chest. And that, too, for four days without food- immersed in thought” (The Circle of Reason 225). Here, Amitav Ghosh gives a subverted interpretation of the Indian myth, and reminds the readers of the rich cultural heritage of India.

In The Calcutta Chromosome, Amitav Ghosh employs a new myth originated from a local situation as a strategy of asserting the Indian intuitive wisdom. Mangala, the progenitor of the calcutta chromosome, was raised to the status of a goddess and was worshipped as Mangala Bibi by her devotees. The myth had originated from the rare occult powers of Mangala, the sweeper woman at Dr. D.D. Cunningham’s laboratory, where experiments related to the spread of malaria was conducted by a team of Western scientists. The mysterious knowledge that she gained did not vanish along with her death as the chromosome had the power to transmit the knowledge to
the deserving person of the next generation. The beneficiaries of the counter science movement had great respect for Mangala and after her physical body succumbed to death they began to worship her as a goddess.

A use of similar myth is found in *The Hungry Tide* where the settlers of the Sunderban islands wish for some natural power that will save them in difficulties as they lead a very precarious life. The legend of Bon Bibi spreads among the settlers and they believe that those who are “good at heart” have nothing to fear when Bon Bibi is there to protect them. Dolphins, the messengers of Bon Bibi dance around Garjontola (a place where Bon Bibi’s shrine is erected in her name) and sometimes gaze right into the eyes of the devotees as if blessing them.

The central focus of *The Hungry Tide* is on the muteness of the historical records and reports of the media about the real plight of the refugee settlers of Morichjhapi in the Sunderbans. Kusum, a silent revolutionary expresses her indignation against the Bengal government and against the police force recruited by the government for evicting the settlers of the island for the sake of animals. Her resentment against 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?” (*The Hungry Tide* 262) The sacrifices made by the refugee settlers including Kusum by their voluntary acceptance of death go unnoticed in the records of history, as they remain silent and mute. Amitav Ghosh, by citing such instances gives support to Spivak’s view that the subaltern cannot speak.

Contradictory viewpoints, expressed through multiple voices constitute the characteristics feature of polyphonic novels, which can be observed in the fiction of Amitav Ghosh. Bakhtin observes, “Dostoevsky’s works 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” (*Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 5). Freedom of characters is supreme in polyphonic novels and they are free to express their ideologies.

The polyphonic narrative method that Amitav Ghosh uses in his novels enables him to foreground the contradictions that prevail in the society. Piya in *The Hungry Tide* is distressed to see the horrifying cruelty shown by human beings towards a ferocious but silent animal, the tiger, when it strays into human habitat. The
villagers are shown to burn it alive. Kanai supports them because he feels that the animal is killing people and is dangerous to the life of others. Fokir also shares Kanai’s view and said, “When a tiger comes in a human settlement, it’s because it wants to die” (The Hungry Tide 295). Thus, to express disparate and contradictory philosophical stances, the novelist introduces the voices of different characters like Piya, Kanai and Fokir. Piya being a deep ecologist holds high 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 human habitat. Just like the village mob, Kanai and Fokir are more anthropocentric and believe that sustenance of human life is of chief importance.

There is an evident contradiction in the attitudes of people towards the refugee settlers of the Sunderbans islands. While the intrusion of the rich Scotsman Daniel Hamilton into one of the islands was considered a part of civilizing mission, the settlement of the subaltern refugees in Morichjhapi Island was resisted at a large scale by the Bengal government as it is identified as a Tiger Reserve, with no permission for human habitation. While Nilima is portrayed as a supporter of the Bengal government and works for the welfare of the Lusibari settlers, her husband Nirmal is represented as the one who is empathetic towards the suffering subalterns of Morichjhapi. Nirmal begins to feel oneness with the Morichjhapi rebellion without the consent of his wife which creates a rift between them by having altogether different ideals and principles.

Amitav Ghosh’s portrayal of the grandmother and her uncle Jethamoshai in The Shadow Lines exposes how they are poles apart in their ideologies, though they belong to same lineage. By emphasizing the extreme nationalistic feelings of the grandmother, Amitav Ghosh tries to express his resentment against the two-nation theory and stresses on the need of a borderless world where everyone treats others as fellow beings. Contrary to the grandmother’s principles, her uncle, Jethamoshai, living peacefully with the Muslim refugees in his own home as one among them, does not believe in borders. The boundary line that separates Dhaka and Calcutta is meaningless to him. “I don’t believe in 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 so then?” (The Shadow Lines 215)
The above discussed instances cited from different novels show how Amitav Ghosh exploits polyphony to give freedom to each character to express his or her ideologies. Santhosh Gupta describes Amitav Ghosh as a writer of shifting ongoing migrations and transnational cultural flows in different countries over different continents, a writer who questions the validities of boundaries and borders imposed by some powerful race/countries or communities over others (242).

Inconclusiveness, unfinalisabilty and open-endedness are features of polyphonic novels. In Bakhtin’s perspective, it is not possible to say “last word” about anything in human sphere, whatever may be the case in the physical sciences, and he highly thought of Dostoevsky for grounding his art of fiction on this principle. At the end of Dostoevsky’s novels, Bakhtin says, “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” (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 166). Following Bakhtin’s lead, Amitav Ghosh resists hierarchy and closure and opts for open-endedness and unfinalisability. Like Dostoevsky, Amitav Ghosh leaves his ideological tensions unresolved leaving his readers to interpret future in their own way. Thus, in a polyphonic method, the foremost space is provided for the readers to interrogate and interpret the text.

The ending of The Hungry Tide with Piya’s decision to finally get settled in Lusibari to pursue research project on marine mammals leaves the readers to decide the outcome of such life. The readers have ample choices to interpret the coming life of Nilima, Kanai and Piya as the novel remains open ended. At the end of The Circle of Reason, the major characters resume their journey again and are now purged of their false dreams. Zindi and Alu head towards home via Tangiers. Jyoti 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” (The Circle of Reason 423). The journey continues and nothing is solved. Hopelessness, rootlessness and alienation may still be the burning issues of life. The ending of The Shadow Lines is by far the most complex. The narrator is in the cozy company of May Price who narrates to him the final redemptive mystery of Tridib’s death. The ending suggests the uselessness of the two-nation theory and the absurdity of binary oppositions like
centre/periphery and East/West. When people unite with love, warmth and friendship, boundaries and borderlines become meaningless and extinct. In the contemporary context, where everyone is migrating, a strict demarcation of lines in man-made maps becomes pointless.

Towards the end of *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Phulboni is seen rushing towards the railway station in the company of other members of counter-science team most probably to embrace death. Murugan- Urmila-Sonali trio and later Antar- Tara-Maria trio have to continue the mysterious task initiated by counter science team through interpersonal transference of soul. A definite conclusion is not given at the end of the novel and the readers are left alone with the blurred images of people in the room of Antar. The ending of *Sea of Poppies* is also indefinite with some characters secretly running away from the *Ibis* in the hope of better life and Deeti, Paulette and Baboo Nob Kissin are left on the *Ibis* giving the readers enough food for thought about their future. Fortunately, they have the second part of the trilogy *River of Smoke* (2011) to answer all their doubts and queries.

Generic hybridity is signaled in *The Calcutta Chromosome, The Hungry Tide, Sea of Poppies* by means of inserted genres like letters, manuscripts in the form of journals and diaries, oral folk songs and excerpts from poems, which are the characteristic features of polyphonic novels. Inclusion of these genres shows that “boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, between literature and non-literature are constantly changing as the novel is a developing genre” (*The Dialogic Imagination* 33). The writing of letters often helps the novelist both to narrate an event of the recent past and to trigger an event of the near future. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Murugan relies on the letter written by Dr. Farley to be sure about the research he is involved into. In *The Hungry Tide*, the letter that Kanai writes to Piya as a gift contains 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 diary written 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 extended letter. Kanai functions as the assumed listener of Nirmal’s diary in which he reveals the story of the Sunderbans islands, its geography, origin, landscape, waterscape, skyscape and the story of human beings who are entwined with the ecology of Sunderbans. The manuscript is intermingled with quotations from Rilke’s
Duino Elegies to substantiate the ideologies of Nirmal. These verses carry authorial intentions; to quote one couplet that mirrors the predicament of the dispossessed refugee settlers:

Each slow turn of the world carries such disinherited

Ones to whom neither past nor future belong. (The Hungry Tide 165)

In his travelogue, Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma, the dream for national and cultural reconstruction is fulfilled. People of Cambodia suffered a lot during the Pol Pot regime and many of them were killed, but in the end those who were alive joined together. Their immediate task was to retrieve and rejuvenate their lost cultural traits that had nourished their life. Amitav Ghosh glorifies their attempt to link together the broken ethnic string by reviving their art forms such as music and dance.

When the ecological and environmental problems pose a great threat to the existence of living beings on the earth, it is the responsibility of the contemporary writers to raise the consciousness of the people across the globe and find solutions for the problems. In The Hungry Tide, Amitav Ghosh warns humanity of an impending ecological disaster. Unless people are ready to discard some of the fanatical ideas of development, designated as “maldevelopment,” (Vandana Shiva 276) global warming and other similar disasters will devour us altogether. Cyclones and earthquakes will become common phenomena, claiming a heavy toll of lives. The Hungry Tide is a reminder to the humankind that unless it exercises caution and restraint in the exploitation of Nature, it may have to encounter terrible consequences. His prophetic vision came true with the outbreak of tsunami which hit the coastal areas of the Bay of Bengal and obliterated the fauna and flora. The catastrophe devastated the whole area rendering many human beings homeless and producing an equal number of orphans without any means of subsistence.

The Hungry Tide engages with its amalgamation of love, history, science and ecology. This novel is set in the Sunderbans, a marginal area by any standards, and also an intermediate zone between land and sea, or fresh water and salt water, indicative of diversity and connections within and between areas conventionally conceived as separate totalities. The list of characters is diverse linguistically,
socially, as well as, in terms of class and ideology. This kind of setting (which emphasizes a marginal area seldom treated in fiction) and a cast of myriad characters have to be considered as the novelist’s plan to subvert the hitherto acknowledged landscapes as the settings of the novels and present before the readers the inability of language experienced by the educated and the illiterate.

The characterization of Nature as ultimately hostile is found in *The Hungry Tide* which is somewhat influenced by his favourite writer Melville (as stated by the novelist in many of his interviews). But Melville never sees Nature as benevolent but as “a deceitful hieroglyph” (Richard Ruland 140) in which people can see their own image. In Amitav Ghosh’s treatment of Nature, the linguistic totalities block the outside world so that people only see a reflection of themselves when attempting to look outside. People are seen as linguistically alienated from Nature, which perhaps is one of the reasons of its projection as hostile. In addition to this, the novelist also seems to thematise the hostility of Nature and its animals partly as a counter-force to the hostility people often show towards Nature and animals in contemporary world. Amitav Ghosh’s novel confronts the barriers that linguistic formations pose between people on the one hand and between people and Nature on the other.

The apparent beauty of the Sunderbans with its confluence of rivers sandbaks, magroves and varieties of trees, birds, fish, crab and other marine mammals is very often marred by predators like deadly snake, flesh-tearing tigers, crocodiles, sharks and leopards. Human habitation outliving the disastrous circumstances of the Sundarbans is indeed hazardous. Ecological degradation due to human interference is wiping out many species. The novelist contextualizes the great ecological disaster faced by the world today by creating two groups of characters in the novel: one representing those who work to maintain the sustainability of the eco system and the other, seeking material prosperity with the help of the newly emerging technologies. Those who work for maintaining ecological balance are represented in the novel as spokesperson of deep ecology and those who work for material benefits as the supporters of shallow ecology.

Another common thread that weaves together all the novels of Amitav Ghosh is the anguish and pain that the migrants experience in an alien land. The struggle of the migrants is not of mere victimizers but it contains a sense of fortitude, the
nostalgia for the lost home and the inner urge to return to their cultural roots. *The Shadow Lines* explores the character of Ila as one caught up in the conflict between the Eastern and Western cultures. Being a native of Calcutta, of an educated middle class family, and having had chances to engage in international travelling with her diplomat father, she has enjoyed the benefits of comfortable life. An aversion to the strict moral and cultural codes of India can be perceived in her due to the impact of westernisation. But the narrator can easily spot her uneasy life as an insignificant immigrant that she is leading in the foreign land. The emotional trauma of Ila is subsequently revealed in the novel. The experiential reality of Piya in *The Hungry Tide* is not much different from that of Ila which is discussed in Chapter Four. Amitav Ghosh acknowledges the multiple identities of his migrated characters who imbibe the moral codes and culture of the country to which they migrate and retain in them their own native culture. This is manifested in all of his novels. Culture is a process of circulation that has nothing to do with national borders. As Robert Dixon in his article “Travelling in the West” argues, “The characters in Ghosh’s novels do not occupy discrete cultures, but ‘dwell in travel’ in the cultural spaces that flow across borders-the ‘shadow lines’ drawn around modern nation states” (10). 

An attempt is made in this study to read the novels of Amitav Ghosh in the light of Bakhtinian theories and deconstructive way of perceiving binaries. As Bakhtin states that in the novels of Dostoevsky, “a plurality of unmerged voices and consciousness” moving for “a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices” (*Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 6) is also the chief characteristics of Amitav Ghosh’s novels. Through polyphony, Amitav Ghosh deconstructs the accepted linear way of representation and tries to foreground those who are, so far, on the negative side of the binary: the subalterns, the marginalised, the downtrodden and the oppressed. His novels, thus, foreground the need to erase the boundary between binary oppositions like superior/inferior, positive/negative in such a way as to call into question the dominating and authoritative systems of thought.