Chapter 3

Narrative Voice

Genette calls the narrator and the narrating stance, the narrative voice. Sanders calls it the “mortar of narrative structure” (199). A narrative cannot influence the reader consciously or unconsciously if there is not the fascination of story and story-telling. E.M. Forster holds, “the fundamental aspect of the novel is the story telling aspect” (33). The originality of story is not in itself sufficient to account for its appeal. As discussed in the second chapter, Kenan says that there are three basic aspects of narrative fiction: story, text and narration. Todorov holds that each different way the fabula is told presents a different sjuzhet. The linguist Emile Benveniste finds difference between the story and the way it is told to draw attention to the presence of narrative voice. Thus, it becomes clear that the act of narration is important rather than the story. There has been extensive experimentation done in this aspect of narrative voice and novel has witnessed a lot of significant structural changes. Narrative, the element of the story, was intact and was not tampered in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. It was the narrator / author who played upon the reader, manipulated, maneuvered and directed the reader’s responses. These types of novels were not concerned with ‘what really happened’, but with the meaning of what the narrator of the work believes to have happened. The narrator in such novels was present as a commentator, analyst, guarantor, organizer and stylist. It is through his eyes that the entire action of the novel was presented. The structure of the novel was well maintained and the plot was well organized till this authority and centrality of the narrator. There was a strong element of story. This led to limit the freedom of the reader to construe.

The craze of story-telling and listening nearly came to an end in the twentieth century. Walter Benjamin observes: “At the beginning of the modern times with the dissemination of information . . .” (89), with the dying of epic side of the truth” and
“with the “decrease of communicability of experience” (86) “the art of story-telling became rare” (89). The authoritarianism of the fully omniscient narrator became indefensible due to the ‘death of the author. A trend towards “finding ways to restore to the reader the freedom of interpretation apparently denied by the nature of the form itself” emerged (Ian Milligan18). The result was that there was a minimum role of the presenter or narrator in the novels. Theoreticians like James, Lubbock, Friedman, Conrad etc. emphasized on the dispersal of the narrator in the form of highly polished centre of consciousness through whom the fictional reality may get filtered to make the novel more open and dramatic. During this period there had been preference to dissolve and submerge the narrator / author within the dramatic action of the story. In the beginning of twentieth century one of the major current that enveloped the form of the novel was that summary was replaced by scene. Many technical devices were used by the author to extend freedom to the reader. The two major trends that emerged were the multiplications of the narrator and marginalization or effacement of the author / narrator. The extreme case of the effacement of the narrator as a telling voice is the stream of consciousness novel. In these novels the scene is in part “interior monologue”. The marginalization of the authorial / narrative voice had a great impact on the form of the novel. This effacement of the narrator added more dramatic elements and his relativistic fragmentation added irony and ambiguity. The ultimate result of all this was that the narrative gained a baffling complexity of form of structure.

The narratologists like Kenan and others opine that howsoever hard the author may try to efface himself or try to curb the narrator / author’s voice, neither can he negate himself entirely nor can he do away with the narrator:

. . . there is always a teller in the tale, at least in the sense that any utterance or record of an utterance presupposes someone who has uttered it. Even when a narrative text presents passages of pure dialogue,
manuscript found on a bottle, or forgotten letters and diaries, there is in addition to the speakers or writers of this discourse a ‘higher’ narratorial authority responsible for ‘quoting’ the dialogue or ‘transcribing’ the written record. (Kenan 88)

Thus in free indirect discourse and the interior monologue also, the author’s ideology is present. “. . . traces of the story teller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel” (Benjamin 92). Bakhtin explodes the myth that the presence of a narrator / authorial voice does not spoil the polyphony of the narrative. According to him “the author of the polyphonic novel does not renounce this consciousness, but to an extraordinary extent broaden[s], deepen[s] and rearrange[s] this consciousness of others, and he or she does not turn other consciousness, whether character or reader, into object of single vision, but instead recreates them in their authentic unfinalizatibility” (Problems 07). Booth presents his view on author’s presence. “We must never forget that though the author can to some extent choose his disguise, he can never choose to disappear” (The Rhetoric 65). There are six enlisted ways, according to Booth, by which the narrator shows his presence. He calls them “overt signs of author’s presence”. These six signs enlisted by Booth are: explicit judgement in the form of personal intrusions, direct unmediated commentary and address, shifting of authorial point of view, inside views, reliable statements of dramatized characters, patterns of myth, symbol and metaphor. So the narrator, in this sense is indispensable for communication and “is crucial for narratology” (Tambling 27). It is the narrator in fact, that forges the atmosphere of a narrative. So the issue of the effacement or banishments of the narrator cannot be raised. The important issue to discuss is to what extent the narrator is drawn attention to? What is the position of the narrator? From whose point of view the story is told? How does the narrator characterize
himself? What is the degree of perceptibility of the narrator? Whether the narrator is overt or covert? To what extent does he participate in the narrative? Whether he is involved or just an eyewitness? Whether he is authoritative or not? Who is the focalizer in the text—the narrator or the character? Whether the focalization is internal or external? If internally focalized whether it is from within or without? How the narrative interpellates the reader? What position does the narrative permit the reader to hold? All these issues regarding narrator and reader have an important impact on the form of the novel.

Booth says that the position of the narrator, his relation to the story determines the quality of the narrative effect. This further influences the point of view of the work. The presence of authorial intrusion is seen in the story in the form of generalizations about life, history, culture, customs and manners, which may or may not be clearly linked with the story. The un-dramatized narrator is an omnipresent one, who is present everywhere to interpret and evaluate the characters and events for the readers. In such kind of fictional writing, the relationship between the narrator and the reader remains inconsistent by the modern standards and the reader depends completely on the narrator for everything, for every detail and even for value judgement. Thus, the gap among the author, the narrator and the reader diminishes. The novel tends to become monological due to the explicit mediation and excessive authorial control in the novel. On the other side, the narrator who performs the narrative function as dramatized narrator seldom makes perceptible mediation between the reader and the events in the story. The dramatized narrator neither states explicitly the significance of the events nor assists the reader. There are no tailor-made comments on events offered by the author to the reader. It is the reader with whom all the responsibility lies to infer everything from the events or characters. Here the text can be focalized either internally or externally. The narrator
governs and determines the distance between the reader and the events in order to bring aesthetic effect of the story. In such type of texts, the narrator ensures all this by activating the readers’ critical faculties. He makes his text reader oriented by working out the involvement and participation of the reader into the narrative in a planned way. About such novels Wolfgang Iser holds:

The reader is given only as much information as will keep him oriented and interested, but the narrator deliberately leaves open the inference that are to be drawn from this information. Consequently empty spaces are bound to occur, spurring the reader’s imagination to detect the assumption which might have motivated the narrator’s attitude. In this way, we get involved because we react to the view point advanced by the narrator.

(*Indeterminacy* 28)

The narrator leads the reader along the road to discovery by leaving a trail of clues for him to follow in the course of the narrative. In this way he guides the responses of the reader while eliciting his collaboration. The presence of the narrator in the text adds a level of complexity and potential irony. This results in polyphony of the narrative. In fact the narrator’s position governs to a large extent the form that a narrative takes. The greater the distance or gap between the narrator and the character, the more intimate is the relationship between the reader and the character. The choice of the narrator and the distance between the character, the reader and the implied author / narrator is ideological. What sort of persona the author takes, depends on what type of story the author tells and what sort of emotional atmosphere suits best for the story. The persona emerges and develops from the attitude and personality of the narrator, which are expressed by the narrator’s choice of words and incidents. This further depends on “what is the moment of history that has allowed the text to appear” (Tambling 48). It becomes
very clear that if we keep in mind the various stages of development of the narrator in the Western narrative that has evolved from history narrator to eyewitness narrator to effaced narrator.

The modern time novelists’ art of novelization in the West is influenced by the dual aim of impersonality and subjectivity. Moreover, since the times of Aristotle, there has been a preference for mimesis over diegesis in the West. So the general trend is towards the dramatized narrator. Robert Frazer holds that the choice for dramatized narrator has a lot to do with alienation prevalent in the European milieu. He further holds: “The marginality of the narrator epitomizes the fragmentation of a society breaking up under strain” (Frazer 83). This means that the narrative voice is not only a grammatical code. The voice that speaks is gendered that entails and endorses consciously or unconsciously class biases and prejudices. Robert Frazer further points out “of all the aspects of language that impinge on style, none has more impact than those devised by means of which the teller of the tale identifies himself or herself, in relation to both the story line and those who appear in it” (Lifting 65). Tambling gives the point more precisely: “Behind the narrator stands an ideology which has interpellated him or her” (33). Thus the narrator / author, howsoever he may try to efface or impersonalize himself, remains present and has ideological bearings on the text. The narrative interpolates the reader into certain positions of near passive agreement to an ideological position.

The present chapter tries to explore the narrative voices in Ghosh's novels selected for the study. The important aspect to understand narrative voices in the novel is to understand the selection and typology of narrator, role of narrator and presence of different characters and focalizers. The writer has to decide which type of narrator shall tell the story or what part of it and with what precise degree of reliability and freedom.
Wayne, C. Booth says: “To decide that your narrator shall not be omniscient decides particularly nothing. The hard question is just how inconscient shall he be?” (The Rhetoric 332) Although omnipresent narration is the most common method of storytelling, it is not necessarily the simplest one and many novelists have experimented continually with it, for example, omnipresent narration with shifting points of view. The other is omnipresent narration along with first person dramatized narration simultaneously. Ghosh's The Circle of Reason follows the previous pattern of narration i.e. omnipresent narration with shifting points of view while The Hungry Tide and River of Smoke follows the second one.

In The Circle of Reason, the opening line “The boy had no sooner arrived, people said afterwards, than Balaram had run into the house to look for claws” (03), confirms the presence of omnipresent third person narrator, but he is not the only entity to narrate the whole text on his own. There are so many character focalizers in the novel to assist the narrator in presenting visual details and successfully creating picaresque effects on the reader’s mind. These are the characters who are an epitome of human suffering, pain and their tales are filtered and focalized through their consciousness. Instead of becoming round or individual characters, Balaram, Zindi, Alu, Maya, Shombu, Jyoti Das, Mrs. Verma, etc. are descriptive characters who represent the entire humanity. They are not flat characters or types. Here we have a teacher, a weaver, a police officer, a professor, a doctor, a scientist, a salesman, a lawyer, a merchant and a housewife.

The novel opens with descriptions of Alu, the main protagonist who remains present in all the three section of the novel along with Jyoti Das, a police officer. An eight years old boy Alu, after the demise of his parents in a car accident comes to Lalpukur to live with his aunt Torudebi and uncle Balaram. It is very interesting to see in the very beginning of the novel, how the omnipresent narrator weaves together
multiple stories around the event of Alu’s arrival and his extraordinary head ‘huge several times, too large for an eight years old boy’(03). People talk about his head differently, but Bolaida says, “No it is not like rock at all. It’s an alu, a potato, a huge, fleshy dug, lumpy potato” (04).

The first part of the novel further deals with Balaram’s passion for Phrenology, the book *Life of Pasteur*, cleanliness and carbolic acid, Toru-debi’s passion for sewing machines and tailoring blouses, Alu’s passion for weaving, Jyoti Das’s passion for birds, Zindi’s passion for money and Shombu Debnath and Parboti-debi’s passion for each other. But these are not straight forward stories. In addition to these, there are numerous events and stories of past that crop up eventually and simultaneously. The omnipresent narrator shows these characters exhibiting their various moods and mental state through memory, recall, interior monologues and stream of consciousness. Balaram’s stories of harassment (as he is a new comer in the hostel), by his seniors are the examples of the same:

Balaram began to back away . . . and with cheerful whoops they laughed at him, snatching at his dhoti. Balaram lurched as the cloth was ripped away. He fought off their hands with a desperate strength . . . . There was only one thought in his mind: that his drawers were dirty. . . . (47)

From omnipresent narrator, the narration shifts to different character focalizers very frequently. In the first section, the character focalizer is mainly Balaram whose memories take the reader back to not only one past, but too many pasts in terms of recent past, distant and remote past. Through Balaram’s memories, Ghosh intertwines various times, events and places very masterfully. Darshan Trivedi, commenting on the structure of the novel says, “. . . the novel is neither a novel of plot, nor a novel of character but a novel of thought. There is no conventional development of plot or character. This novel is a story of entire humanity. All characters belong to the world” (Trivedi 18).
The three parts into which *The Circle of Reason* is structurally divided are—*Sattva; Rajas and Tamas*—the names derived from *The Bhagavadgita* and these sections denote three *gunas*, i.e. qualities—Reason, Passion and Death respectively that deal symbolically with three phases of human life. *Sattva* symbolizes the search of wisdom, *Rajas* symbolizes the life of passion and *Tamas* stands for darkness and destruction. All the three sections are taken over by the omniscient narrator. While the first part may entirely be called a memory narrative presented through Balaram as the main character whose memories dominate the first part of the novel, the second part is suffused with mainly Zindi’s stories as a main story teller though there are other story tellers in this section like Abu Fahl, Hajj Fahmy, etc. In the third section there are again memories of the past. In this section, Mrs. Verma remembers past stories related to her father, the book *Life of Pasteur*, the germs and cleanliness. There is also a lot of drama, action, movement, arguments, debates, conversations, interrogation, discussions in this part of the novel rendered through both mimesis and diegesis modes of narration.

In *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh resorts to another Indian narrative tradition of embedded stories, i.e. stories with in a story, an age-old narrative device. Here he uses this device as a sub-narrative strategy which reveals much about the tellers like Balaram, Zindi and others. It is a device which at the same time highlights the fictionality of the fiction thus created. Zindi is a master story teller in the second part of the novel whose character is fully developed by the novelist as a character narrator and focalizer. The omnipresent narrator remarks about her oratory and narrative skill as such:

That was Zindi’s power. She could bring together empty air and give it a body just by taking of it. They could never tire of listening to her speak, in her welter of languages, though they know every word, just as well as they know the lines of songs. And when sometimes she chose a different word or new phrase it was like the pressure of a potter’s thumb on a clay—changing the thing itself and their knowledge of it. (228)
The narrative strategies like interior monologue and stream of consciousness are used throughout the novel. The following paragraph that carries a clue of Zindi’s own stories that spin in her mind in stream of consciousness manner is one such example:

. . . but that afternoon she stood in the passage forgetful of time and everything around her, as though she were seeing it for the first time. She stared at the dusty panes of the display window . . . Inside, she stood marooned among the snippets of cloth that carpeted the shop and swiveled about . . . She had to hold on to the counter to steady herself for the shop was dancing around her as he spoke, spinning, dissolving, transfiguring itself. (209)

The omnipresent narrator is able to unravel the hidden corridors of consciousness of the characters, their thoughts, feelings, emotions, memories and speculations. The narrative is nowhere straight and simple as there is always running back to past and even remote past. Though there are digressions and complications, but the omnipresent narrator has full control on this eventful narrative without being getting involved.

Varying degree of distance can be marked between the implied author and the main character focalizer in the novel. The story is mostly filtered through the consciousness of all major characters in the novel, but being a third person narration, the implied author intrudes in the guise of minor characters, images, picaresque details, metaphors, symbols, intertextuality, magical realism, mystery and unusual comparisons.

The metaphors like carbolic acid, sewing machines, birds, weaving and the book ‘Life of Pasteur’ run throughout the narrative. In Ghosh's hands metaphor becomes a dynamic narrative instrument to represent the perception of not only a character, but also the genius of Ghosh’s narrative craft as presented in the following extract:

So many words, so many things. On a loom a beam’s name changes after every inch. Why? Every nail has a name, every twist of rope, every little
eyelet, every twig of bamboo on the heddle. A loom is a
dictionary glossary thesaurus. Why? Words serve no purpose; nothing mechanical. No, it is because the weaver, in making cloth, makes words, too, and trespassing on the territory of the poets gives names to things the eye can’t see. (79)

Journey is used as motif in the novel. As the characters are always on move, there is ample time and scope for events to happen and stories to be told. There are too many digressions. The narrative sequences are broken up into fragments placed at widely separated points in time and place. The uncoiling of memories, a technique used by the writer, heightens the reader’s curiosity. The overlapping of stories by different characters is not merely a structural device, but serves to emphasize the importance of past in the lives of these characters who wish to transport themselves into their past; to their preserved memories. This brings great solace in their shattered lives. It is in this quest of fuller meaning in their lives that these characters take not only physical journey but also mental journey back to past again and again. Ghosh’s narratives show how through the motif of journey, the omnipresent narrator weaves together the multiple narratives in all the three sections with so many characters, their past and present, childhood and adulthood, love and violence, private and public life. They live simultaneously two lives—the life lived in memories and the life in reality, thus making the narrative non-sequential.

Ghosh is remarkable in the perception of history in *The Circle of Reason*, that is evolved from the narrative itself and he never attempts to bulldoze history into some other absorption. History retains historicity as a process which depends upon characters who are representatives of important historical tendencies, whether it is Balaram; the idealist Bhadralok, or Bhudev; the stupid and unthinking congressman or even Damanhouri; the one-eyed fantasy of the noob bourgeoisie. What is more important from
narrative point of view is that history is reflected through different mediums in the novel; in the first part through science and ideas that change the society, in the second part through Damanhouri’s story as a narrative from which worldly and mortal lessons are to be drawn and in the third section through chance and coincidence; as it is by “chance” that Mrs. Verma’s father was Hem Narayan Mathur, i.e. Dantu, who had been guided by the same book *Life of Pasteur* that his friend Balaram entrusted to him many years before. It is the same book that Balaram read to the young Alu and by chance Alu finds this book again in Algeria. Alu describes the role of the book in his life and in this last section, he is presented the book by Mrs. Verma who finds him to be the most rightful owner of the book *Life of Pasteur*. In the end, Mrs. Velma Comments: “If there’s one thing people learn from past, it is that consummated death is another beginning” (447). Alu agrees with her arguments of using carbolic acid instead of Gangajal for the last rites of Kulfì and he too solemnly adds *Life of Pasteur* in the funeral pyre as if confirmed that it too will reborn.

The stories related to Alu are not worked out in direct manner, rather suggestive and symbolic hints are provided to get meaning under the surface of the structure. The fall of the Star is associated with Alu’s mythical name Nachiketa, that becomes significant and meaningful at the moment when Alu gets entrapped for ‘four’ days without food or water under the debris of the Star, immersed in his thoughts. This event is narrated by omnipresent narrator, but the focalizers are Hajj Fahmy, Abu Fahl and Rakesh with different versions. In the novel on such moments the implied author chooses to remain distant from the characters by juxtaposing different stories. Abu Fahl tells that the Star fell “because, though parts of it were strong, the whole of it was weak because of bad cement and sandy concrete” (264).

The omnipresent narrator comments on the atmosphere that is created after Abu Fahl’s narration when Abu Fahl, after rendering his version of story just sits quietly but
confidently, taking the seriousness and thoughtful silence that has prevailed upon the
room, as the testimonial to his intelligence and skillful narrative craft. Here Hajj Fahmy
reacts when he disapproves Abu Fahl by saying: “You are wrong, Abu Fahl”, and claims
that he knows “the real story; the true story” (264). The omnipresent narrator presents the
whole conversation between Hajj Fahmy and Abu Fahl in mimesis mode of narration:

Abu Fahl challenged the old man: If you’re so sure ya
Hajj, why don’t you tell us?
Hajj Fahmy looked around him: Are you sure everyone
wants to hear it?
Voices rose: Yes, there’s tea, and there’s tobacco and what else
have we got to do?
Hajj Fahmy inclined his head, smiling.
It’s just a story. (245)

Hajj Fahmy, as a main narrator, presents his version of the story before the
master narratee Zindi and a novice Abu Fahl. Before moving on to the main issue he
narrates many stories which are marked by so many digressions. In the manner of age
old tradition of Indian storytelling, Hajj Fahmy presents the whole story of conflict
between the Malik and the British, imprisonment of the Malik, exploitation of the oil rich
al-Ghazira by the British, the betrayal, disloyalty and enmity of Amir (Malik’s half
brother) who joins hands with British and amasses wealth with them constructing the
shopping mall called an-‘Najma’ or the ‘Star’ on a waste and marshy land near the
border of al-Ghazira which Amir and his friends knew won’t last long. Rakesh and Abu
Fahl listen to Hajj Fahmy’s narration. Abu Fahl disapproves Hajj Fahmy’s story and
holds his version to be right. But Rakesh discards Abu’s views. Rakesh asserts that he
and Alu were the first to hear the rumbles out of the basement. They had been already
running before they heard Abu Fahl. Alu entangled because he had discovered just at that time the two sewing machines and he was covering them when the Star collapsed. These stories by different narrators with different points of view and different versions speak volume of the quest for truth which is a ceaseless process that entails reinterpretation and rebuilding of stories. To present this phenomenon, Ghosh makes use of varied voices of multiple narrators in his novel which is the characteristic and prominent aspect of polyphonic novelist.

In *The Glass Palace* Ghosh uses third person omnipresent narrator and a dramatic moment to introduce Rajkumar Raha, an orphan, the main protagonist and the central character in the novel. At the backdrop of the story Ghosh presents depredation and ravages done by colonialism, the subjugation of Burma and the exile of the Royal family. The omnipresent narrator first introduces Rajkumar but the reader finds this eleven years old boy focalizing the dramatic scene when ‘Mandalay first experienced the booming sounds of English guns and cannons’ (03) as the last King is dethroned and further describes the whole episode of the flight of the Royal Family. All this is presented through the eyes of the little Rajkumar with artless fidelity of a small boy giving a true account of the whole scenario. In the very beginning of the novel the reader comes to know about the legendary Glass Palace in Burma through Rajkumar, one of the main character focalizers, who looks at it for the first time and completely awestruck by its beauty. Though, the event that is presented through an eleven year old urchin may not be relied upon, but it is also evident that the historian author narrator is also there at the background of the narrative to give the readers a brief account of the whole incident and the palace through the awestruck eyes of Rajkumar. All this is the outcome of the author’s meticulous research who reports everything diligently, accurately, thoughtfully and precisely. The authorial presence is felt in every detail like description of palace, military maneuvers, air raids, *ti-pans* taming the elephants, models of automobiles and
air craft, drilling of oil, timber trade, food, clothing etc. All these details are historically specified and presented by omnipresent narrator and character focalizers both.

The omnipresent narrator narrates how the proud Queen Supayalat was feared and followed blindly by the Burmese, how unceremoniously and in undignified way the conquering British had overthrown Thebaw the last Burmese king and his pregnant Queen from Mandalay to remotely situated Ratanagiri in the West-East of India. It was a shrewd act by the British, who were successful in uprooting, harassing and demeaning the royal couple, entirely wiping them out from people’s memory at home and erasing their existence in their native land. The king and the Queen lived a life of utter manginess in an unknown and foreign region while their own land Burma was plundered completely by the British and depleted of its precious natural resources—petroleum, teak wood and ivory. The omnipresent narrator, through different character focalizers, presents the voracity inherent and innate in the colonial process that appears to be crystal clear in such happenings in Burma.

The most important aspect of the novel is, however, that not even a single episode in the whole text represents the British directly. They have been treated in the same way as the 18th or the 19th century the British writers used the colonized countries, as background or as references, that may affect the narrative style or the story line, but do not have direct association with the characters. *The Glass Palace* deals with the history seen and presented through the eyes of subaltern. It is like giving the voice mainly to the colonized people, but the voice is given to them by colonized (the writer) not by the colonizers. Ghosh writes in ‘Author’s Notes’ at the end of the novel:

> In the five years it took me to write *The Glass Palace* I read hundreds of books, memoirs, travelogues, gazetteers, articles and notebooks, published and unpublished; I travelled thousands of miles, visiting and
re-visiting, so far as possible, all the settings and locations that figure in the novel; I sought out scores of people in India, Malaysia, Mayanmar and Thailand. (549)

From the very beginning of the novel, the omnipresent narrator mediates between the characters and reader when the story describes Indian soldiers with the British uniform and insidious racism in society between the yellow and the brown, between the yellow and the white and between the locals and the foreigners. In the early parts of the book the authorial presence becomes evident and quite visible through the detailed summary given by the narrator about the life in Burma before and after the arrival of the British. The historian narrator author begins his narration with the description of the emergence of the British dominance and the narrative begins with the following lines:

There was only one person in the food-stall who knew exactly what that sound was that was rolling in across the plain, along the silver curve of the Irrawaddy, to the western wall of Mandalay’s fort. His name was Rajkumar, and he was an Indian, a boy of eleven—not an authority to be relied upon. (03)

Thus, the omnipresent narrator himself declares the boy to be an unreliable one. But at the same time the reader should not forget that there is continuous presence of the historian narrator author and each and every fact is filtered through his observation. Anirvan Sen comments on The Glass Palace, “The pleasure about reading Ghosh's work comes not only from story, but also from the description of the life style, behaviour of the people, the subtlety of the cultural impact and of course, the details of the day to day life.” There are many graphic descriptions depicting the continuous presence of the historian-anthropologist-narrator-author who has an eye for each detail for which he gives detailed description. Ghosh writes his description with great precision. The narrator
presents in the following lines through the old observing eyes of the exiled King Thebaw using the technique of interior monologue:

The king walked out of the pavilion, flanked by Queen Supayalat and her mother.

. . . The procession passed slowly through the long corridors of the palace, and across the mirrored walls of the Hall of Audience, past the shouldered guns of the guard of honour and snapped-off salutes of the English officers.

Two carriages were waiting by the east gate. . . . Just as he was about to step in, the King noticed that his canopy had seven tiers, the number allotted to a nobleman, not the nine due to a king. (43)

The main character focalizer in the novel is Rajkumar and his being an orphan kind of personality identifies him with the postcolonial identity of a writer. In her essay, “The Road from Mandalay: Reflections on Ghosh's The Glass Palace” Rukmini B. Nair very appropriately comments:

Rajkumar’s symbolic as well as real orphan-hood implies that he has to invent a family where none exists; . . . Rajkumar has in effect to solve the same dilemma that confronts the postcolonial author . . . he has to make sense of ‘existential’ conrundum that plagues all individual who cross . . . the well defined lines of ‘national identity’ and family genealogy . . . (“The Road from Mandalay: Reflections on Amitav Ghosh's The Glass Palace”)

The cultural space for most of the characters in Ghosh's novel is very huge and so it is with the different voices in his novels. The King Thebaw is the symbol of those who, however, accept their fate more or less like a philosopher. But queen Supayalat is one
who has quite different point of view. She sees the dehumanization of colonial process. She represents the voices of those who have the fate like her:

We were the first to be imprisoned in the name of progress; millions more will follow. This is what awaits us all: this is how we will all end—prisoners, in shanty towns born of the plague. A hundred years hence you will read the indictment of Europe’s greed in the difference between the kingdom of Siam and the state of our own enslaved realm. (88)

Here one is reminded of Edward Said’s comments on the dehumanizing process that the Occidentals practiced on the Orients who were never looked at as complete human beings by them. They were “seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined—as the colonial powers openly carved for their territory taken over.”

The narrator uses free direct discourse between different characters, for example, there is notable conversation between Dolly and her friend Uma who raise question on established beliefs and historical facts. On one occasion Uma, the wife of the Indian Collector, asks Dolly about the cruelty of Queen Supayalat and in reply Dolly makes Uma look at the conditions and the whole scenario from her perspective:

‘You know, Uma,’ she said in her softest voice. ‘Every time I come to your house, I notice that picture you have, hanging by your front door . . .’

‘Of Queen Victoria, you mean?’

‘Yes.’

Uma was puzzled. ‘What about it?’

‘Don’t you sometimes wonder how many people have been killed in Queen Victoria’s name? It must be millions, wouldn’t you say? I think I’d be frightened to live with one of those pictures.’ (114)
This conversation depicts clearly the author’s view about the representational dice in pictures, photographs or literature. Later we find in the novel that Uma accepts her friend’s perspective and removes the picture from her house. The whole scene depicted by the author demonstrates how prejudiced the standards of civilizedness and cultured behaviour can be under historical and political conditions.

In a typical picaresque manner the novel presents Rajkumar, one of the main protagonists, moving from one place to another time and again. Thus, journey as a motif, is used in the narrative at literal, aesthetic and metaphorical levels. Rajkumar, an India born, is also far from being a flawless character. He is the representative of those Indians who amassed wealth and attained power as they benefited through the British colonization. It is a fact that the British colonized both India and Burma, but in Burma, it were the Burmese who were oppressed and exploited while the Indians as well as the people from other countries were given many chances to flourish. One of such stories is that of Rajkumar’s story of success. Through memories, conversations and stream of consciousness of Rajkumar and other characters as character focalizers, Ghosh depicts how colonialism is a process where values are always compromised. The following paragraph focuses on the shattered mind of Rajkumar in stream of consciousness manner:

Everything he owned was in that palace, all that he had ever worked for; a lifetime’s accumulation of labour stored as a single cache of wood. . . .

It was he who had concentrated all his holdings in this one place—that too was part of the plan—and now the bombs had claimed it all. But it didn’t matter; nothing mattered so long as Neel was unharmed. The rest were just things, possessions. But Neel . . . (463)
Ira Pandey observes, “The rise and fall in Rajkumar’s life, his exile and return are at once tragedy and romance.” She further comments:

Throughout the book, Ghosh uses one end to signal another beginning so that at one level, nothing changes and everything does. There is a strong suggestion of Buddhist metaphysics in this technique. Life and death, success and failure all come in cycle and Ghosh uses the conceit of a pair of binoculars early in the book to sensitize the reader to this perspective. Thebaw, the Burmese king watches over the Ratnagiri harbour with his binoculars, “predicting” the return of sailing vessels, and warning the town people of impeding disasters. What makes the tragedy of human life bearable is a graceful acceptance of the inevitability of pain and suffering. (Review on The Glass Palace).

The difference in the perspectives and ideologies of different characters about suffering in life has been shown by the omnipresent narrator through King’s views on ‘Karuna’ who defines it as “the immanence of all living things in each others, for the attraction of life for its likeness” (211). Dolly clearly understands the connotation of this in full manner which is almost incomprehensible to Rajkumar, who like Queen Supayalat cannot set apart himself from such sufferings and pains in the manner Dolly and the King can.

The authorial presence is also felt when there is prolonged narration of the war years and the violence that brings about drastic changes in the lives of characters and the fate of the nations alike. The authorial presence becomes very clear from Ira Pandey’s comments:

In the end Ghosh brings alive the ideology of the INA, dwelling as only a historian can, on the irony of two sets of Indian soldiers locked in a battle
on opposite sides in alien territory. But by far the most moving account is the long March from Burma to India. Refugees displaced by War and hatred stumble along the sticky mud of the Irravady that clings and sucks. Ghosh’s prose mimics photography in describing individual horror pictures. (Review on The Glass Palace)

Ira Pandey further observes in the same review, “Hope, reconciliation, affirmation and faith in Suu Kyi’s presence lead the wheel to turn yet again. A perfect arc brings the book to a perfect end”.

Polyphony operates in many ways in The Glass Palace. Ghosh projects various dynamic, equally important and distinctive voices that also contribute to the novel’s strong and active heteroglossia. The Burmese King and Queen represent not only the losses of colonized but are also the symbol of cultural richness, integrity and an unshaken faith. The polyphonic voices are highly forceful in the projection the characters of Rajkumar, Dolly, Maya, Arjun and others.

In the novel there are many independent personas or voices whose truth becomes evident when it is joined with another’s truth. Bakhtin’s observation is highly significant as he states that “[a] single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices are the minimum for life; the minimum for existence” (252). The reader observes how some of the characters have their influence on the others. For example, Rajkumar’s adhesiveness to his business is the result of his Uncle Saya John’s influence upon him in his adolescent years when he comes to Mandalay.

Another important point as according to Bakhtin is that one can observe the conversation between the two from dialogical perspective. Bakhtin asserts that each utterance is presented in relation to earlier utterances and therefore, doesn’t exist in isolation. When Rajkumar is not willing to go to Burma with Dolly, the omnipresent
narrator presents his situation as follows: “He was contrite and full of apologies; he said he had no memory of where he had been or why he’d gone. He urged Dolly to make another booking and promised that “it would not happen again” (481-82). Dolly says nothing when Rajkumar postpones going back to Burma. She understands him so well that without saying anything she decides “that it would be better to leave Rajkumar where he was—both for his own sake and Jaya’s” (482). Here, one can also find that though Rajkumar’s discourse is directed at Dolly, it doesn’t elicit any response from her. It doesn’t, however, imply that the dialogue and the conversation have not been successful between them because even when she listens to Rajkumar while remaining completely silent, she influences Rajkumar’s narrative even by her silent response to Rajkumar’s words. Thus the narrative put forward different voices that reveal the whole concept of lost identity, rootlessness, mass movement, displacement and nationalism in different ways.

While reading the novel The Glass Palace, one finds that there is a sort of uncertainty of perception or meaning. The way Ghosh depicts the characters of Rajkumar and Uma, it may be observed that he has great reverence and regards even for a person’s indeterminateness and indefiniteness. He appears to hold that living human beings cannot be turned into merely voiceless and mute objects of some second-hand, finalizing, cognitive process. Ghosh, in Bakhtin’s manner, appears to believe the idea that “as long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized” (Problems 166). The sudden revelation of identity of the omnipresent narrator as dramatized first person narrator in the end of the novel, the remotely expected revelation of the relations between Rajkumar and Uma and the ambiguous interlay of style and voices, attribute to the novel a polyphonic appeal. Different characters of the novel acquire self-consciousness and self-awareness through their dialogical interactions or conversation with the others.
There are many ideas and counterpoints they actively rebut, counteract and append each other.

It is not the author that gives the final word as Ghosh seems to restrain himself from this task. In this context Bakhtin remarks that in “human being there is always something that only he himself can reveal in a free act of self consciousness and discourse, something that does not submit to an externalizing second hand definition” (Problems 58), are highly applicable in the context of depiction of the characters in the novel. In a dialogical exchange with Uma, Rajkumar goes on to suggest that the Indian soldiers are protecting not only the empire but the people like them also:

‘You have so many opinions, Uma – about things of which you know nothing. For weeks now I’ve heard you criticizing everything you see: the state of Burma, the treatment of women, the condition of India, the atrocities of the Empire. But what have you yourself ever done that qualifies you to hold these opinions? Have you ever built anything? Given a single person a job? Improved anyone’s life in any way? No. All you ever do is stand back, as though you were above all of us, and you criticize and criticize.’ (248)

Ghosh allows dialogic activity through different character focalizers and shift in focalization in the novel and thus does not let the characters keep mum and set into finished products. He acknowledges the complexity of things and multiplicity of discourses in the novel.

The specific concern for human freedom and dignity is presented by Ghosh through different voices in the novel. There are different instances of oppressing tendencies of the rulers presented through the omnipresent narrator or the character focalizers. The omnipresent narrator presents vivid pictures of wrong practices of the Queen. Queen Supayalat has several maids to attend her. These maids are “Young girls,
orphans, many of them just children” (7). The lack of the Queen’s concern for these poor girls is quite evident in their practice of ‘shiko’ in which the attendants have to prostrate before the Queen to show their respect for her. This depicts how the different practices adopted by the rulers, lend to atrocities towards their subjects.

The narrative also voices against the practices of imperialists who impose their culture and thinking on their subjects through self ascribed roles of reformers and representatives of modernization. One such example can be observed in the propagation of modernization and women’s education with a view to abrogate and appropriate the native culture. While discussing the novel The Glass Palace, N. K. Neb brings out the novelists perspective regarding the deceptive nature of colonialists as he comments:

Ghosh exposes the hollow nature of the humanistic concerns of the colonialist embodied in the protection of rights of women and their education. Lima, brings out the novelists’ perspective regarding the deceptive nature of humanism presented by the colonialists: How was it possible to imagine that one could grant freedom by imposing subjugation, that one could open a cage by pushing ill inside a bigger cage? How could any section of a people hope to achieve freedom where the entirety of population was held in subjugation? (122).

There are character focalizers that expose the reality of British Empire which is barbaric towards not only its subject but also towards its propagators. These are the young English men who are used in an exploitative way in order to extend the Empire’s hold and strengthen its power. The British colonialist employ their young men to work in the forest as long as they can endure the dangerous atmosphere and unhealthy climate in order to explore and exploit the forest wealth under hostile and adverse surroundings. The character focalizer Saya John is one among those who indirectly conveys the voice
of the author exposing these aspects of imperialism: “Think of the kind of life they lead here, these young Europeans. They have at best two or three years in the jungle before malaria or dengue fever weaken them to the point where they cannot afford to be far from doctors and hospitals” (74). The motive of the company to use these young men as mere puppets or tools to promote its interest is exposed through Saya John who becomes the authorial voice here:

The company knows this very well; it knows that within a few years these men will be prematurely aged, old at twenty-one; and that they will have to be posted off to city offices. It is only when they are freshly arrived, seventeen or eighteen, that they can lead this life, and during those few years the company must derive such profit from them as it can. (74)

The wretched condition of these young British who remain mute and suffer meekly exposes the evil designs of the British, though they themselves are representatives of the imperialists. One can feel here the strong protesting authorial voice with all its conscious efforts, challenging the assumed superiority of the Western culture. His concerns are here voiced by character focalizer Dinu, who exposes the motives of these power hungry people: “Their ideology is about the superiority of certain races and the inferiority of the others” (293).

Ghosh criticizes the hierarchical structure of society even if it is ordained by the native rulers. Dinu as character focalizer, tells about General Ne Win and his colleagues who functioned against their own subjects. He tells Jaya:

General Ne Win, the new dictator, began to juggle with currency. . . .

Thousands of country’s brightest young people fled into the countryside. . . .

With each year the generals seemed to grow more powerful while the rest of the country grew ever feeble: the military was like an incubus, sucking
the life from its host. . . . A new censorship regime developed, growing out of the foundations of the system that had been left behind by the old Imperial Government. (535)

He further comments: “The newspapers were full of strident denunciations of imperialism. It was because of imperialists that Burma had to be shut off from the world; the country had to be defended of the neo-colonialism and foreign aggression” (537). In past Dinu tells his wife Daw Thin Thin Aye, who was severely humiliated in scrutiny board office: “Look at the way these thugs use the past to justify the present. And they themselves are much worse than the colonialists; at least in the old days, you could read and write.” (537).

In The Glass Palace, the presence of the author and his ideology is felt through Ghosh's rejection of a fixed notion of human identity. The other important narrative technique used by Ghosh is the manner in which focus shifts from one country to another. All the major characters are distributed by Ghosh over to Burma, India and Malaysia. Instead of being voices of Indians, Burmese or Malay, the characters are remembered as Dolly, Uma, Rajkumar, Saya John, Dinu and Neel. In the same manner Rajkumar’s sons having two different names, one Burmese and other Indian, present their destabilized nation based identities. Ghosh's perspective here comes closer to an understanding of multiple possibilities of human existence. This gives platform to multiple concerns and voices, which in multidimensional ways, presents plurality of views of different characters in the novel.

The most significant aspect of Ghosh's fictional discourse is the presentation of dialogical perspectives through his characters. The point of view and meaning in this discourse lie not only in individual utterances, but in their dialogical negotiations which provide platform to raise the voice and present their perspective. This can be observed
by analyzing most of the major characters, which get modified during the development of plot through their dialogical interactions. Uma is under the strong influence of the strategies of the Empire which she considers to be rational and humane. She considers them right for their concern for bringing light of civilization to the people suffering trauma under the darkness of cruelty inflicted by the native rulers. But later when a popular insurgent movement is violently crushed by the British rulers, she understands the hollow claims of British Empire that is “. . . so skillful and ruthless in its deployment of its overwhelming power; so expert in the management of opinion” (254). Here Uma as character focalizer represents the voices of awareness of those in the novel who understand that it is not only the British imperialism working against their subjects to curb their existence but the natives are in no way different from them. The people like Rajkumar indulge in oppressive activities like providing indentured labours to the British. Uma objects and says:

‘Rajkumar, you’re in no position to offer opinions. It’s people like you who’re responsible for this tragedy. Did you ever think of the consequences when you were transporting people here? What you and your kind have done is far worse than the worst deeds of the Europeans.’

(247)

Another voice that emerges to be very strong in the novel is depicted through Aung San Suu Kyi’s presence. Dinu Says, “ Because she’s the only one who seems to understand what the place of politics is . . . What it ought to be . . . that it cannot be allowed to cannibalize all of life, all of existence” (542).

*The Glass Palace* is permeated by numerous voices, massages, meanings, metaphors, images, symbols, allusions and genres. The urge for real exploration of meaning and truth is opened in the dialogue among different viewpoints. Ghosh is able to
stretch every debatable point of view to its maximum force and intellectual profundity. He tries to make an earnest effort to delineate and develop all the semantic possibilities engrafted and concealed in a given perspective. The different voices along with authorial voice show the “multimodality” of the novel. Thus the panoramic, linguistic, semantic and philosophical significations of Bakhtin’s polyphonic novel and the emphasis that it lays on “otherness” of the utterance are clearly projected in the text. The natives of Mandalay, the migrants, the servants in the palace, the people of slums near Queen’s palace, the people of different countries—India, Burma, Malaysia, Bangladesh and Singapore are the denizens of different countries speaking different languages. Again, it is quite evident that they belong to different social classes and cultural backgrounds. Different professions, languages, beliefs, cultures, rituals, religions, nationalities and worldviews of these people with diverse backgrounds enrich the heteroglossia of the novel. There are different modalities of narrative like magic realism, myth, magic, metaphors, symbols, realism, irony, and fantasy incorporated in the text. The novel contains different genres and extra literary material like history, allegory, photography, letter writing, and picaresque images. Here Ghosh tries to focus on the unnerving complexity and complication of the real world instead of showing a simple, straightforward, unified and monologic viewpoint or meaning of reality.

Like Bakhtin, Ghosh is against all authoritarianism, absolutism and monologism. He favours to explore varied alternatives and possibilities through dialogism. It is due to this heterogeneity and otherness that the text appears to be clearly polyphonic. Ghosh assigns great importance to excursive modes that allow demonstration of other voices and ideologies. Thus the presence of variety of different genres, the multiplicity of equally sound and valid perspectives and the indeterminacy of the narrative structure makes the text—distinctly polyphonic.

In The Hungry Tide Ghosh has incorporated varied voices not only from diverse backgrounds but also from different generations. Along with omnipresent narrator, the
other voice is that of Nirmal—the first person dramatized narrator in the novel who embodies a lived relation with the past and carries a range of historical and cultural knowledge. He tells about the historical past of Morichjhapi, the refugees, government policies, resettlement camps, confrontation between government forces and the settlers and many more things. Nirmal’s narration is quite often like the voice of an elderly folks who narrates stories to their younger generations—the history of their village and groups. In *The Hungry Tide* as in *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh has not only revolutionized his perspective of history but his mode of creative discourse about history has moulded a new kind of novel by resorting to the indigenous tradition of oral narrativity. This is Ghosh's way of incorporating the indigenous tradition of story-telling. Here Ghosh has been able to incorporate history well within the narrative structure itself. As a character focalizer, Nirmal starts his narration with the words ‘“All right, then listen.’ . . . ‘Now that you’ve asked you’ll have to listen. And pay attention, for all of this is true”’ (40). As dramatized narrator he begins his diary abruptly with an address to Kanai: “*You, Kanai, were among the last to see Kusum in Lusibari, in 1970*” (143). The diary written by Nirmal, is read by Kanai and thus revealed to the readers. Here we should understand instantly that this story is the part of the saga of suffering of the people of Morichjhapi which itself is the major part of the narrative and also the major influence on Nirmal and further on Kanai.

Nirmal, both as character focalizer and the dramatized narrator, tells everything as if he had been present everywhere, as if the beats of historic rise and fall of the people of Morichjhapi flowed in his veins. Similarly the other character focalizers Horane, Nilima, Kusum narrate the history of Morichjhapi in their own ways. Ghosh aims to expose colonialism and the policies of government from a variety of differently located voices and ideological positions represented by Fokir, a fisherman; Kanai, a businessman
and a translator; Piya, an India born American based cytologist; Nilima, a social worker; Horane, a boatman and Nirmal, a Marxist and a social activist.

The novel opens with scenic description by omnipresent narrator. The characters narrate so many stories and through their different points of view Ghosh throws as much light as possible on the history of Morichjhapi and the life of the refugees. The main narrator is not only one, i.e. the omnipresent but includes Nirmal as dramatized first person narrator (as the narrator in _The Shadow Lines_) whose narration is constituted of personal memories, experiences and other characters’ recollections written as copious notes to give a detailed account of Morichjhapi incident. Much of the part of the novel is the narrative account of Nirmal as a writer and Kanai as a reader of the book explaining the incidents, but both are not in the position to be omniscient observers. As the narrative agents, they do not take the reader beyond the superficial aspect of that world of Sunderbans and Morichjhapi. All the central consciousnesses also tell the stories from different perspectives. Their views of things and the world are constantly subjected to authorial censure or qualifications.

It is not only through the point of view of the literates like Kanai, Piya, Nirmal and Nilima that the meaning of loss of freedom and identity has been presented, but the reader is presented with a narrative ‘history from below’–a view of what this displacement means to ordinary people, both in terms of how they understand and what it implies for not only their future but for the coming generation too.

In the chapter ‘Morichjhapi’ Nilima as character focalizer tells Kanai about Morichjhapi, the refugees, government policies, resettlement camps, eviction of settlers and confrontation between government forces and the settlers. While thinking of the past in the novel there is shift in narrative situation. In terms of narrative form, Nilima instead now starts thinking and withdraws into her mind to establish a pattern that will explain her particular mode of revolt in larger social and historical terms. “But in time it came to
be learnt that they were refugees, originally from Bangladesh. Some had come to India after Partition, while others had trickled over later. In Bangladesh they had been among the poorest of rural people, oppressed and exploited, both by Muslim communalists and by Hindus of the upper castes” (118). Over a period of about a year, there had been a number of encounters between the refugee settlers and government forces.

It becomes apparent that the novel incorporates a specific collective vision of the people, suffering from common oppression and with a common need for future directions. The identification of this transcendent ‘we’ leads immediately to the interpretation that the core of the text’s meaning may be traced in the collective ethics and experience depicted. Ghosh wants his pen to be the voice of the silent and suppressed and to achieve this purpose he incorporates diverse voices from society. Here, one also observes the narrator’s role as a truth teller.

In *The Hungry Tide*, the voice ‘we’ is not only used to suggest mere connectivity. It is highly functional. Ghosh's omniscient narrative voice generally merges with the people and community voice and keeps on impinging on character’s thoughts and actions. As all the characters of the novel are involved, their views of things are constantly subjected to the omniscient narrative voice or to the communal voice ‘we’. Sometimes both the authorial and the communal voices merge to show a polyphonic view of things.

As a narrative voice, Ghosh incorporates the collective voice ‘we’, but this collective ‘we’ is used in a variety of ways. The pronoun doesn’t always represent the same persons. There are a number of collective ‘we’s. This further makes the novel fully polyphonic by adding the multiplicity of voices. For example it means at times the habitants of Lusibari or Morichjhapi. In fact the ‘we s’ represent the common folks of Sunderbans who are more or less in the background but whose presence is not felt incessantly. They are the masses of past and present generation, the people of village, the
settlers, the migrants or the displaced refugees. The protagonists like Kusum, Horane and Fokir are also the part of the collective ‘we’s’, but they are represented through the pronouns he, she, his, her, him or they, as is evident from the following passage:

*It was terrible to see Kusum: her bones protruded from her skin, like the ribs of a drum, and she was too weak to rise from her mat. Fokir, young as he was, appeared to have weathered the siege in better health and it was he who was looking after his mother.*

. . . Kusum had starved herself in order to feed Fokir. But the truth was not quite so simple. For much of the time, Kusum had kept Fokir indoors, fearing to let him out because of the swarming police. (260-61)

The ‘we’ voice is also incorporated in the text in chapter ‘Crimes’. It opens with first person narrative describing Nirmal’s mental agony through the collective voice ‘we’:

*The siege went on for many days and we were powerless to affect the outcome. All we heard were the rumours: that despite, careful rationing, food had run out and the settlers had been reduced to eating grass. The police had destroyed the tube wells and there was no potable water left; the settlers were drinking from puddles and ponds and an epidemic of cholera had broken down* (260).

According to Gikandi: “. . . collective ‘we’; narrative voice . . . is . . . the basis of greatest authorial authority” (*Reading* 145). Giving example of multiple narratorial and ideological ramifications of the use of the collective voice, he says: “The ‘we’ voice does not, in fact, have a singular role. There are instances when it adopts the position of an observer, standing above characters and their experiences . . .” (*Reading* 145).

At the outset of the novel, the omnipresent narrator draws the attention of the reader with abrupt opening: “Kanai spotted her the moment he stepped onto the crowded
platform: he was deceived neither by her close-cropped black hair nor by her clothes . . .” (03). Thus the facts about the characters and events are given either by the omnipresent narrator or by character focalizers in Ghosh's novels. The novel begins with diegesis mode of narration and later it shifts to mimesis when Kanai and Piya talk to each other. The entire novel is constructed of shifting of both kinds of narration—mimesis and diegesis.

The narrator also takes refuge in other textual references and genres to present the inner mind of his characters, for example, Nirmal seeks confirmation of his ideas and thoughts in German poet Rilke’s Duino Elegies and invokes him persistently. Nirmal remarks are noteworthy as he philosophically quotes Rilke (a voice which he trusts the most), to describe the plight of migrants of Morichjhapi:

‘Because of what the Poet says, Fokir. Because the animals

“already know by instinct

we’re not comfortably at home ,

in our translated world”.’ (206)

At one moment after the feast of city guests in Morichjhapi, Nirmal is so much hurt that he finds solace only in Rilke’s poetry. Here Nirmal finds silence to be more eloquent and emphatic than speech as he comments:

There is so much to say, so much in my head, so much that will remain unsaid: oh those wasted years, that wasted time. I think of Rilke, going for years without writing a word and then producing in a matter of weeks, in a castle besieged by the sea, The Duino Elegies. Even silence is preparation. As the minutes pass, it seems to me that I can see every object in the tide country with a blinding brightness and clarity. . . . How better can we praise the world but by doing what the Poet would have us do: by speaking of potters and ropemakers, by telling of
One of the basic methods to analyse the text narratologically is to understand the distinction between narration and focalization. In The Hungry Tide, focalization shifts mainly among Kanai, Piya, Fokir, Moyna, Nilima and Nirmal. Nirmal’s point of view has been given through his packet which is left for Kanai to read and also through other characters. There are also occasional shifts to the external omnipresent narrator and to other internal character-focalizer.

As far as emotive aspect is concerned, the distinction between internal and external focalization further corresponds to the difference between neutral or uninvolved focalization on one hand and on the other hand subjective, coloured or involved focalization. In The Hungry Tide, for example, in the beginning of the novel the passages which tell about mangrove forests are externally focalized:

‘When the tides create new land, overnight mangroves begin to gestate, and if the conditions are right they can spread so fast as to cover a new island within a few short years. A mangrove forest is a universe unto itself. . . . There are no towering, vine-looped trees, no ferns, no wildflowers, no chattering monkeys or cockatoos. . . . Every year dozens of people perish in the embrace of that dense foliage, killed by tigers, snakes and crocodiles. (07)

But, the same mangrove jungles in the chapter ‘Signs’ are internally focalized by Kanai when he is left alone by Fokir in these jungles:

Kanai’s head filled suddenly with vision of the ways in which the tide country dealt out death. The tiger, people said, killed you instantly with a swipe of its forepaw, breaking the joint between your shoulder and neck.
You felt no pain when it happened; you were dead already of the shock induced by the tiger’s roar.

. . . The mangroves’ branches were pliable and sinuous; they bent without breaking and snapped back like whips. . . . it was as if he had passed into the embrace of hundreds of scaly limbs. (328-29)

Here the same mangrove jungle is focalized in an entirely different colour as they are focalized internally reflecting the inner state of Kanai who is left all alone by Fokir in the mangroves jungles.

In *The Hungry Tide* another aspect of focalization, the ideological aspect, is also important to notice. One of the ideologies is related to duplicity of the government policies at the cost of human beings. This makes the audience see clearly the government’s hypocrisy. Many questions come in the mind of the reader as how difficult these rules are to be followed. On the other hand, there is Piya’s own ideology. She is one of the main character focalizers and shows her resentment on killing of a tiger. Kanai convinces her:

Kanai spat into the dust. ‘Piya, you have to understand—that animal’s been preying on this village for years. It’s killed two people and any number of cows and goats —’

‘This is an animal, Kanai,’ Piya said. ‘You can’t take revenge on animal’

(294).

The reader is also bound to question here. Who is more important under the circumstances presented in the text—the citizens of a country or its national animal tiger?

In *The Hungry Tide*, unlike the narrator of *The Glass Palace*, the narrator is neither much authoritative nor give much assertions. He rather tries to be more neutral,
objective and maintains significant distance from the characters. Throughout the text the narrator remains uninvolved. In the novel the omnipresent narrator is not overt. The function of projecting the political ideologue and narrating the history is also attributed to the characters themselves. Piyali Rao’s and Nirmal’s voices are the strongest voices amid the diverse voices incorporated in the text. Ghosh is engaged in narrating the situation and revealing explicit political and social awareness of his work. But at the same time, he neither likes his ideological position or political vision validated by his narratives nor suffers from any essentialism. He neither practices the realism of detailed historical representation seen in *The Glass Palace*, nor makes direct authorial intrusion. In *The Hungry Tide* there is inclusion of juxtaposition of voices, reflective and expositional modes of writing rather than explanatory. Instead, Ghosh is interested in raising questions through these characters. Kusum asks, wiping her face:

‘. . . the worst part was . . . to sit here . . . listen to policeman . . . hearing them say that our lives, existence, was worth less than dirt or dust. . . .

Every day, sitting here, with hunger gnawing at our bellies, we would listen to these words, over and over again. Who are these people, I wondered, who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them? Do they know what is being done in their names? Where do they live, these people, do they have children, do they have mothers, fathers?’

(261-62)

Ghosh's narrative technique is more or less like that of the European novelists. Through the consciousness of the characters he focalizes the text as there are frequent indirect monologues and dialogues in his novels. In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh as an omnipresent narrator and implied author remains invisible and neutral. He is present in his novel as an omniscient neutral observer. But it doesn’t mean that Ghosh as an author
completely effaces himself from the novel. In consonance with his modernist ideology, Ghosh also maintains authorial reticence, that is, he does not project his ideology and vision directly and explicitly. It is through the voices of the characters he projects his vision. This also he does in a subtle manner. He does not make his characters his mouth piece. He maintains ironic distance with his characters in *The Hungry Tide* and in the end he holds no vision and leaves the narrative open-ended. There is preference for plurality of ideological positions as manifested in the ideas of Fokir and Kanai; Nirmal and Nilima; Kanai and Piya; Moyna and Fokir and many more. Thus, Ghosh imparts polyphony and hetroglossia to his novels. As such, there is no propagandist tone or didactic note for the readers. There are no cliché endings in his novels. Ghosh has based his main narratives in the novels on orderly progression of events leading towards a suggested goal, but he has also given his narrative forms a pattern, by presenting certain events from past through memories, stories, memoirs, diary and letter writing.

Throughout the text, Ghosh leaves his characters to work out their own fate. This is not to suggest that he vanishes from the scene completely. He relies on mimetic techniques also for presenting his material. By resorting to showing or scenic presentation in his novels, he tries to achieve the imitation of action. In order to achieve the scenic effect in the text, he makes use of scenes, dialogues, interior monologue, detailed narration, direct discourse, free direct discourse, free indirect discourse and pattern of images and symbols. “This apparent conflict between telling and showing”, according to Gikandi, “... is a larger conflict between the inner reality of the novel and social reality on the one hand and on the other the character’s individualized view of the world the novel represents and the author’s more objective and self conscious mediation of life and experience” (Reading138).

Between Kanai and Fokir, the omnipresent narrator suggests that Fokir has to be trusted more rather than Kanai. In the text the narrator appears to sometimes contradict
Fokir’s views, but in fact he raises sympathy for Fokir when Kanai has a conflict and doubt in his mind about Fokir’s intentions. Fokir leaves him alone in the jungle but here Fokir is supported by the omniscient narrator. Through interior monologue the narrator tries to distance himself and presents the inner mind of Kanai who later realizes his fault. The narrator explains Kanai’s state of mind in an uninvolved manner: “In seeing himself in this way it seemed perfectly comprehensible to Kanai why Fokir should want him to be dead—but he understood also that this was not how it would be. Fokir had brought him here not because he wanted him to die, but because he wanted him to be judged” (327).

Further the omnipresent narrator clears his stance by narrating the same views of Kanai through mimesis mode of narration and mainly free direct discourse, again distancing him completely from the characters but at the same time supporting Fokir as Piya asks Kanai:

‘Was it Fokir’s fault then? Did he leave you behind deliberately?’
‘No,’ said Kanai firmly. ‘I happened to fall in the mud and lost my temper. He actually wanted to help me – I was the one who shouted at him and told to go away. He’s not to blame.’(334)

The omniscient narrator implicitly determines the way the reader trusts the character or not. The novelist or the implied author co-ordinates all, being the unifying factor between all the elements and also the ultimate authority. As omniscient narrator he manipulates the reader’s responses and ultimately determines the way the reader trusts one character more than the other.

Fokir is a character who speaks very less in the narrative. He is mute but not incommunicable. The greater the trauma the more silent and taciturn he is. The fact becomes amply clear when we analyze the voice of varied characters. Throughout the
text, Fokir does not speak much, but his silence doesn’t fail him. When there is a situation in which Piya and Fokir are not able to express themselves due to the language barrier, there is communication between them only through gestures, expressions and signs. In such circumstances the need to mediate between the reader and the characters becomes important and therefore, the narrator resorts to non-verbal communication here. As a character focalizer, it is through Piya’s observations and thoughts that Fokir’s mind is reflected and the narrative devices used by the omniscient narrator are interior monologues and stream of consciousness. The omniscient narrator also helps to fill in the gaps. He keeps a close eye on the intonation of his characters’ voices also. After the cyclone and Fokir’s death, when Piya comes alone, Kanai and Piya use very few words: “Kanai said softly: ‘Fokir?’ Her voice was almost inaudible: ‘He did not make it. . . . ’” (392). Here the voices are, bruised, suffocated and stiffed as they do not know what to say at this utter moment of grief.

The omnipresent narrator weaves the pattern of conflict between man and nature in all its dimensions, exploring both the negative and positive aspects. He does not resort to any easy solution in this and maintains ambivalence. In the episode of killing of a tiger the narrator neither directly condemns the questions of Piya as she asks: “So you are just going to stand by and let it happen? . . . What was that? What did he say? . . . ” (294-95), nor he (narrator) upholds explicitly Kanai and Fokir’s views regarding this matter as Kanai gives Fokir’s point: “He says, “When a tiger comes to human settlement, it’s because he wants to die” (295). There is no ideological cliché at the end. Thus Ghosh emerges to be an artist par excellence. He harmonizes all the visions into the novel in a beautiful manner.

As an omniscient narrator Ghosh intrudes, but his authorial intrusions are totally conscious and he knows where to start and where to stop. He never crosses the limits of aesthetic boundaries. So, Ghosh's omniscience, detailed documentaries, descriptions and
political discourses at the same time never mar the polyphony of the text. Ghosh as a subtler artist controls the narrative movement in such a way as not to disturb the aesthetic poise. This is the hallmark of his narrative technique while cocktailing the techniques of Western narratives with Indian oral narratives. He does not merely resort to telling and detailing the realistic details himself only; instead he resorts to character focalizers, myths, symbols, memory, interior monologue, testimonials, diary writing, intertextuality and other narrative techniques like mimesis mode of narration too. As a consummate artist, he attempts to create a more aesthetic fictional world which would carry out his observation of the lives of people and the world around them both in the past and the present.

Ghosh in his entire oeuvre shows a strong historical and political consciousness. As a conscious historian, he takes up the cause of struggling masses against the imperial and unending hegemonic structure of coercion and seduction perpetuated by the colonizers. The novel *Sea of Poppies* moves from the period of opium production in the farms of Bihar to making of opium balls in factory for opium trade to successive stages of oppression of the poor by the colonizers and ironically by the Indians working as agents, mediators, middlemen, instructors, overseers and managers under them. Further the novel depicts their conditions as suppressed slaves and indentured labours in the slave ship, the *Ibis*. Let us see how in the novel undertaken here, Ghosh manipulates different narrative voices in the narrative to project the whole scenario.

The novel opens with omnipresent narrator narrating Deeti’s vision of a ship in diegesis mode of narration. “The vision of a tall-masted ship, at sail on the ocean, came to Deeti on an otherwise ordinary day, but she knew instantly that the apparition was a sign of destiny for she had never seen such a vessel before . . .” (03). In the very beginning the reader’s attention is at once arrested and throughout the novel this vision is seen again and again by Deeti. In chapter one the omnipresent narrator introduces the
main protagonist Deeti who later becomes the main character focalizer and consciousness. Here Ghosh uses stream of consciousness, interior monologues, recall, reminiscence and flashback—the European devices of narration as he does in his other novels. At the same time, he follows the Indian narrative tradition of story-telling as in the novel the omnipresent narrator in descriptive and in diegesis manner gives the summary, introduces the characters and then these characters reveal themselves telling many stories of their present and past. They, as character focalizers, also reveal other characters both in the present and the past either through mimesis or diegesis modes of narration. The same pattern is followed throughout the novel. Ghosh works the situation through consciousnesses of Deeti, Neel, Zachary Reid, Paulette, Kalua, Jodu, Baboo Nob Kissin, etc.

There is not only physical space given to the main characters by the novelist but mental spaces are also given to them time and again as Deeti’s interior mind is illustrated here by using interior monologue and stream of conscious technique when she remembers her past. In an interior monologue here, Deeti remembers the time when Kalua was humiliated and tortured by the three landlords in past:

Ever since the night of her wedding, Deeti had been haunted by images of her own violation: now, watching from the shelter of poppy field, she bit the edge of her palm, to keep from crying out aloud. So it could happen to a man too? Even a powerful giant of a man could be humiliated and destroyed, in a way that far exceeded his body’s capacity for pain? (57)

The novel presents a collage of uniquely delineated characters each having distinctive traits or characteristics and becoming instrumental in delineating the atmosphere of the period. Ghosh declares that “Writing is about people”. Every book begins with a character. What strikes him most is the departure that people like Deeti
undergo during migration. Ghosh creates these characters from differently located ideological positions in the novel as labours, villagers, lascars, convicts and farm labours to explore the forces that propel them to go across province and finally see them through different stories narrated by them. Deeti is a villager, who has never seen sea and is so much afraid of sea. But her circumstances take her on the Ibis where she meets other people (A television interview with Anuradha on CNBC in “Beautiful People”).

The novelist projects Deeti as the main character focalizer as she is the most vibrant and vocal character who knows when, how and where to speak. She can take decision not only for her own life but for others too. The first chapter starts with Deeti’s vision of ship. Then there are descriptive passages, mostly in diegesis form of narration describing her puja room, her drawings on the wall of puja room, her adverse circumstances, her exploitation by Chandan Singh, her manipulation in drugging her mother-in-law (who even dies later due to over dose of drugs), her reactions when “assailed by the Shiladhars” (98) in Gazipore factory her assertiveness on the Ibis and the like. This shows her to be a person who does not want to remain merely an object in the hands of circumstances. She is as assertive as any conscious person would be in the time of difficulty. On the Ibis her realization of her own identity, her decision to elope away with Kalua and leaving behind her daughter Kabutri, her dominant presence on the board, compassion for inmates and her revolt against the wrong doers on the ship show her to be a vital block in the entire edifice of the gender assertion. She decides to leave her daughter behind for her better future though she is fearful of some unseen and unnamed, that always haunts her. In an interior monologue her fears are presented by the omnipresent narrator:

... how could he conceive that she would go to a place which was, for all she knew, inhabited by demons and pishaches, not to speak of all kinds
of unnamable beasts? How could he, Kalua, or anyone else, know, that it
wasn’t true that the recruits were being fattened for the slaughter? (205).

The multiple perspectives and plurality of voices give Ghosh a wider scope of
analyzing and comprehending the incomprehensible and enigmatic colonial syndrome,
the material reality out of which filters down the character’s life resulting in anger,
shame, revolt, transformation and sometimes loss of identity and loss of self. Neel finds
his new identity in the Alipore Jail. The omnipresent narrator presents Neel’s inner mind:

Raising the mirror to his face, Neel saw that his hair had been cut short
and two rows of tiny Roman letters had been inscribed unevenly upon the
right side of his forehead:

forgerer
alipore 1838 (SOP 292)

Here the small lettered words are used symbolically by the narrator to present
Neel’s altered identity—a new identity reduced from big lettered and high sounding
words—‘Nawab’ or ‘Raja’—the symbol of his earlier royal, hegemonic and high
position.

Along with interior monologues, recall, etc. most of the time there are summaries
and commentaries by omnipresent narrator while presenting the scenes like Kalua’s
exploitation by the Jamindars, the conversations among Mr. Burnham, Mr. Doughty and
others about opium trade in China, Neel’s arrest, Deeti’s escape from Sati’s pyre, Neel’s
court case, the one-sided arguments and decision of the judge against Neel, Neel’s
changed circumstances, his insult, humiliation and life in jail with Ah Fatt, chastisement
lessons forced on Paulette by Burnham (for his own chastisement), the atmosphere of
fear and chaos on the ship created Bhyro Singh and the Captain, Shiladhars’ demand to
hang Kalua, and escape of some inmates from the Ibis after the killing first mate and
Bhyro Singh. These are some of those major incidents in the novel that speak volume of
the misdeeds of those who are on hegemonic positions possessing their own ideologies. They also represent the other and opposite voices ‘from above’.

Throughout the novel, the authorial voice becomes evident when it mediates between the characters and the reader by using metaphors, myths, magic realism, visions, premonition, heteroglossia, folk songs, etc. But this mediation is entirely different. He is neither overt nor obtrusive but highly controlled. Ghosh, as an omniscient narrator, ushers the readers into the novel though the entire narrative movement is controlled by him. Every experience and feeling of the characters is delineated through their filtering consciousness. Ghosh incorporates diverse voices in the narrative. As such, in his novels there is a network of voices at different levels, each presenting a distinct mode of consciousness. His voice (authorial voice) is one such voice amid the plethora of voices. Multiplicity of voices is the real hallmark of Ghosh's perfect craftsmanship and as a conscious craftsman and omnipresent narrator Ghosh exploits the role of narrator in a variegated manner.

In the novel, the omnipresent narrator, like a camera recording, presents graphic details of the events and the characters. The authorial periscope moves from outer reality into the minds of characters, enabling the reader to establish personal relationship with them. The reader is thrust quickly into the psychological state of mind of the varied characters. Deeti is one such character who raises questions against the ill-treatment with Indian workers working in Gazipur factory. The omnipresent narrator presents Deeti as character focalizer in her visit to opium factory and shows the factory’s gloomy atmosphere which is focalized through Deeti’s eyes. This atmosphere fills her with fear, dread and sympathy for workers. The enormity of the factory and the shattered and astonished part of Deeti’s self, who has never seen such a place before, is focalized from within. Her visit is presented in highly descriptive manner as if the reader is actually visiting the dark, gloomy and dim interior of the factory with Deeti. Here Deeti is the
most reliable character who is in complete consonance with the omnipresent narrator who raises questions through Deeti:

Who would guess, in looking at them, how much time and trouble went into filling those vessels? So this was where they came, the offspring of her fields? Deeti could not help looking around in curiosity, marveling at the speed and dexterity with which the vessels were whisked on and off the scales. (93)

The omnipresent narrator brings forth the trials and tribulations of the marginalized people. This enables the interplay of all the distinct multiple voices of the major or the minor characters in the novel. There are shifts from the narrator to the character focalizer and then to another character focalizer throughout the novel. The narrative function is performed sometimes by the major characters themselves in first person. Ghosh wishes to make the reader watch constructively the character’s point of view. As character narrators they narrate their own stories in first person. The novel has been narrated by the participating character focalizers who recount the events of their personal experience, betrayal, guilt, struggle, exploitation, fear, love and their separation. Ghosh as a narrator effaces himself and at times provides the inside views of the characters. Such a situation invites a critical mind to explore the relationship between the character and the narrator. The temporal position vis-a-vis the narrated events show them to be separated agents, Gerard Genette makes this distinction very clear when he writes that the two different entities—the narrating ‘I’ and the narrated ‘I’, i.e. the narrator and character are differentiated and thus recognized by difference in age and experience. It is this very difference that gives authority to the narrator to deal the character with a kind of ironic superiority. He further suggests that “the voice of the error and tribulation (i.e. the narrated I) and the suffering character could not be
identified with the voice of ‘understanding and wisdom’ (i.e. the narrating I or the narrator in a narrative discourse)” (Narrative Discourse 252). In Sea of Poppies, these two ‘I’s are presented through not one but many character focalizers.

Deeti, the character narrator is different from Deeti—the focalizer in Gazipur factory. Deeti as a character focalizer remembers Kalua’s humiliation scene. Thus almost all characters are related to at least two times zones operating simultaneously. In the lines quoted in the previous paragraph regarding Kalua’s humiliation by jamindars (93), the character focalizer is Deeti and the character narrator is also Deeti but her temporal and spatial position is different. In the previous one she is mute spectator having no courage and voice to revolt and in the latter one she is confident, mature Deeti with reflective and understanding mind.

Where other novelist might be inclined to make an overt authorial observation, Ghosh skillfully maintains an ironic distance. He enters into a dramatic relation with the reader by constantly shifting the narrative focus from one character to the other and one event into other event. In the court scene, the omnipresent narrator presents the views on judgment process from two highly diverse and opposite ideological positions simultaneously—one is presented through the judge; an Englishman and the other through a convict turned Raja; Neel Rattan Halder. The judge’s comments before giving verdict to Neel Rattan for dupery are important to notice from subaltern point of view. Here the narrator mainly focuses on the treatment of the Englishman (colonizer) with an Indian (colonized). The judge mistreats and lets down Raja Neel Rattan whose majestic position and place is completely ignored and unacknowledged:

‘The temptation that afflicts those who bear the burden of governance,’ said the judge, ‘is ever that of indulgence, the power of paternal feeling being such as to make every parent partake of the suffering of his wards
and offspring. Yet, painful as it is, duty requires us sometimes to set aside our natural affections in the proper dispensation of justice . . .’ (236)

The judge further gives his point by giving all sorts of arguments:

‘But we see no merit whatsoever in the contention that men of high cast should suffer a less severe punishment than any other person; such a principle has never been recognized nor ever will be recognized in English law, the very foundation of which lies in the belief that all are equal who appear before it . . .’ (238)

Here the most important aspect of narration is the polyphonic ambience when in the same court scene one moves to the next passages and finds simultaneously the passages where the omnipresent narrator describes Neel’s inner mind reflected through Neel’s physical responses, his body language, his comments and his thoughts which are contrary to the superficial impartiality of the British judge, who is just another pawn used by Mr. Burnham against Neel Rattan. Here Neel’s thoughts are in complete consonance with the narrator’s ironical remarks on the partiality harbored by the British judges against the Indians in the nineteenth century. Here is an observation by the omnipresent narrator presenting Neel’s mind through the narrative device of stream of consciousness:

As the voice droned on, it seemed to Neel that the Judge’s words too were turning into dust so that they could join the white cloud . . . he found it easier, even now, to follow the spoken language into converting it into script, in his head. One of the effects of this operation was that it also robbed the language of its immediacy, rendering its words comfortingly abstract, as distant from his own circumstances as were the waves of Windermere and the cobblestones of the Canterbury. So it seemed to him now, as the words came pouring from the judge’s mouth, that he was listening to the sounds of the pebbles tinkling in some faraway well. . . .
There was something about this that seemed so absurd to Neel . . .

for if his presence in the dock proved anything at all, it was surely the opposite of the principle of equality so forcefully enunciated by the judge? . . . in this system of justice it was the English themselves—Mr. Burnham and his ilk—who were exempt from the law as it applied to others: it was they who had become the world’s new Brahmins. (237-39)

The words like ‘dust’, ‘operation’, ‘robed’, ‘abstract’ and ‘distant’ are used specifically by the omnipresent narrator to present the superficiality and mechanical process of the British judgement process which is mocked at by Neel who finds it to be “laughable” (239). This also highlights the unjust ways of the British judges pretending about their immaculate judicial system. Through using the words like ‘seemed’, ‘absurd’, ‘comfortingly abstract’, ‘sounds of the pebbles’, ‘the opposite of the principle of equality’, ‘world’s new Brahmins’, etc. the narrator meticulously and deftly manages the focalization and at the same time the reader finds him in complete consonance with Neel as character focalizer.

There is also the incorporation of collective voice ‘we’ which is a way to make Ghosh’s novel multi-voiced. The plural narrative voice ‘we’ is an effective device in creating a sense of inclusiveness. Throughout the text Ghosh as a narrator does not give any overt commentary on the behaviour of the characters. He manipulates the reader’s response by resorting to a very subtle and complicated symbology. Even at the end he maintains the authorial posture of reticence. In spite of all the unfavourable situations on the *Ibis*, Ghosh sends a beautiful message of solidarity and oneness among the workers and labours on boards through the motif of the *Ibis*, where its inhabitants represent the collective voice ‘we’. The other important character focalizer is Paulette who like Deeti, is reflective, insightful and compassionate and like her advocates the idea of kinship and
oneness among the *Ibis* inmates by calling them “*jahaz-bhais* and *jahaz-bahens*” (356) on the board. Deeti is awe struck with her (Paulette’s) simple but forceful idea. She feels elated as she expresses herself: “Yes, said Deeti, from now on, there are no differences between us; we are *jahaz-bhais* and *jahaz-bahen* to each other; all of us children of the ship” (356). The omnipresent narrator is in complete consonance with both Deeti and Paulette as his voice merges with them: “. . . this vessel that was the Mother-Father of her new family, a great wooden *mai-bap*, an adoptive ancestor and parent of dynasties yet to come: here she was, the *Ibis*” (356-57).

All this again is a representation of their collective voice ‘we’. Different characters speak different languages on the *Ibis* creating true atmosphere of microcosm on the *Ibis*. As Lise Guilhamon also says that the striking feature of the novel is in its linguistics heterogeneity and oneness: “. . . the Anglo-Indian dialect of the British in India (Mrs. Burnham), the pidgin that came from China and specialized nautical jargon of laskaras, the American English of a Mulatto freedman of Maryland as well as Bhojpuri, one of the main dialects of Hindi and French mingle and mix in the text. . . .” (12). In an interview with Priyamvada Gopal, Amitav Ghosh expresses the creative joy of writing fiction when he says:

> For me, the novel is the most complete form of expressive utterance not only does it allow you to tell a story, but it also permits you to create the world with in which the story is told. This means that a novel can create its own linguistic universe, and this was to me one of the most exciting thing about writing *Sea of Poppies*. (“Confronting the Past”)

Here Ghosh further asserts:

> *Sea of Poppies* is not about any one thing anymore than the past (or the present) are about one thing. There can no doubt that colonialism was the
dominant political reality of nineteenth century India. Yet, it is important to remember that it was just one aspect of that reality: people also lived and laughed and loved, as indeed people do everywhere no matter what their political circumstances. (“Confronting the Past”)

Thus, till the last moment of the narrative, Ghosh as a narrator does not directly comment but maintains artistic ambivalence. By incorporating diverse voices, Ghosh has been able to suggest that there are various possibilities. The omnipresent narrator presents different view-points through myths, vision, magic realism, images, metaphors, translation and motif.

Opium as an object and the Ibis as a place, work as important motifs in the novel and link the three sections of the novel. Opium affects the life of all the characters directly or indirectly. The Ibis is a place in the novel that shows different characters and their voices, perspectives, beliefs, traditions, cultures and mindsets. The atmosphere on ship is quite different from the atmosphere of the land. The migrants face the cruel treatment. The snobbery of the British, the power politics that run through the English and also among the Indians assisting them (the British), the harshness against the girmityas and the wretched condition of the girmityas on the Ibis have been clearly shown in the following passage. Baboo Nob Kissin’s translation of Captain Chillingworth’s orders shows the atmosphere of fear on the Ibis:

The difference is that the laws of land have no hold on the water. At sea there is another law and you should know on this vessel I am its sole maker. While you are on the Ibis and while she is at sea, I am your fate, your providence, your law giver. This chabuk you see in my hand is just one of the keepers of my law. (404)

Such detailed episodes, presented through omnipresent narrator in both diegesis and mimesis modes of narration, clearly indicate the desperate situation of the indentured
workers on the board who are filled with an ‘unspeakable dread’ (406). Through the
whip and terror the Captain on the Ibis expects submission and obedience from the
helpless workers and they are forced to do hard task. Like the Jamindars (in the case of
Kalua) and the British judge, the captain also considers him to be a lawmaker with
ultimate authority and thinks him to be worthy of propriety showing excessive pride and
callousness.

The characters in the novel experience transformation from beginning to the end
of the novel. They seem to be victimized in the beginning but as the plot advances, each
of them exhibits a strong sense of individuality. They endeavour to make new destiny
and new identities for themselves. Deeti, Kalua, Paulette, Zachary Reid, Neel, Jodu,
Baboo Nob Kissin and Serang Ali—all undertake challenges and face ordeals on their
way to a new destination set for either by their choice or circumstances. Their journey
becomes motif in the novel and they are constantly in the process of travelling
experiencing transformation.

Moving forward with different focalizers there are passages in the novel when the
narrator very beautifully throws light on the writer’s views on narrative craft and
strategies like manifesting gaps in the narrative. When Ah Fatt tells Neel about his past
life, the following comments by omnipresent narrator indirectly presents Ghosh's views
on art of story-telling:

It was not because of Ah Fatt’s fluency that Neel’s vision of Canton
became so vivid as to make it real: in fact, the opposite was true, for the
genius of Ah Fatt’s descriptions lay in their elisions, so that to listen to
him was aventure of collaboration, in which the things that were spoken
of came gradually to be transformed into artifacts of shared imagining.

(375)
This passage clearly suggests the authorial presence commenting on the art of story-telling. When an artist creates some work of art, imagination is at work to make it more convincing. The actual challenge of description is not to describe things chronologically. The writers should suggest and leave some gaps so that readers do important role of filling those gaps. It is this great joy to discover the unspoken and incomplete things that is involved in the reading process of all master pieces.

Ghosh uses the chronotope of journey in *Sea of Poppies* which commences with Deeti’s vision of a vessel. In the end of the novel, she is seen on this very ship entangled in the mid of her fateful journey towards Mauritius. In the space or more concretely the distance between these two points, the story of so many other characters—Neel, Zachary Reid, Paulette, Kalua, Jodu and Baboo Nob Kissin are narrated. The first section ends with beginning of new life of Deeti, the second section ends with the beginning of new life of Raja Neel Rattan and the third section ends with new fate of all the characters of the novel.

Ghosh’s novels reveal his prime obsession with history. He fictionalizes the facts of history and gives the novel new dimensions. Thus, in his novels, fact is fictionalized without any loss of grace and dignity which adds the charm of reading. The indentured labours, migration and mass movements are the main themes in *Sea of Poppies*. The typology of narrators, different characters and their narratives, conversation in mimesis mode of narration, dialogues and language are the supporting factors along with the narrative techniques like memory, recall, stream of consciousness, interior monologue, heteroglossia, realism, magic realism, picaresque details, symbols, motifs, images and the use of the genres like myth, folk-songs, etc. that create the proper atmosphere of a specific time period of history. David Rabson points out:

> If opium were the dominant theme of *Sea of Poppies*, it would probably be a less interesting book. Instead, Ghosh has used the voyage of the *Ibis*
as the center piece of much broader canvas, seething human diaspora in which every character has a story to tell and every passenger is on the run from someone to something. (“Into the Opium Wars”)

The story of the second *Ibis* novel *River of Smoke* by Ghosh, set in a year before the First Opium War in Canton, focuses on Eastern trade. It was the time when trade and industrial revolutions were newly underway in the West. This enterprise was played out mainly in China and dominated by England. It also involved a host of other countries and many of the migrants from all over the world. Here Ghosh shows his concerns and engagement with history, colonialism, migration, power politics, etc.—the issues that still persist in the modern world.

As compared to *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke* proceeds at a far slower pace as different voices from history are incorporated by Ghosh to give each aspect and every detail of the historical period of opium trade and wars. Ghosh does not choose to directly continue the plot and project the same voices from the first book. He charts a more circuitous route. The most familiar voice from the *Ibis* Deeti, the chief protagonist recedes into background along with some other characters. She gets her place only in a non-linear first chapter—just to be an eye through which the whole incident of the escape and parting of five persons from the *Ibis* has been shown. Here as character focalizer she assists the omnipresent narrator to reveal the truth and details which were in a hurried manner escaped in the closing part of *Sea of Poppies*.

In *River of Smoke*, Ghosh has given preference to only those voices from *Sea of Poppies* which could further help him present the historical scenario. Deeti is the driving force behind much of the action only in the previous novel. In *River of Smoke* the vibrant and highly vocal voice of Deeti is replaced by Bahramji Naurozi Modi, a Parsi businessman from Western India, whom Ghosh puts at the centre of his narrative as
character focalizer to assist the narrator detailing the realities of the opium trade, as it was a male dominated area of 1938 Canton. Thus, Bahramji as character focalizer becomes the prime voice in the narrative along with omnipresent narrator. There is also the French orphan Paulette here, but only as a passive voice in the novel. She could least help the omnipresent narrator in projecting the realities of the opium trade, but through her as well as Fitcher and Chinnery the narrator has given the details of the plants’ trade through sea in past and specifically in the year 1938. Chinnery appears to be the other important character focalizers and also as the first person character narrator in this second sequel of the Ibis novels.

The background and the places are important elements of narrative used by the writer. The setting of River of Smoke is the period of 1938 in Canton in China when the Chinese emperor had newly enforced the longstanding and long ignored ban on opium. The situation in Fanqui-town, the foreigner enclave grows restless and volatile. The narrative creates the atmosphere of the historical period through many lengthy and serious discussions on the opium trade presented through different voices of the traders and colonizers on one hand and voices of the colonized, the downtrodden, the oppressed, the sufferers and the marginals on the other hand to present vivid account of the period. The narrative moves very slowly as if the novel’s structure mimics the flow of traffic on the Pearl River at the port of Canton.

In River of Smoke the secondary story line is related to Botany, in particular the search for rare camellias in the past. Paulette, the French orphan, is on an expedition with a British gardener. Because of the heightened restrictions on foreigners in this critical time, the actual task is given to Robin Chinnery, a friend of Paulette from childhood. In fact, the sub-plot voices a thematic inversion of the opium trade. In one story line, outsiders force something on China. In the other, the outsiders attempt to extract something from China. Each endeavour ultimately features a clear profit motive. The
similar conditions can be observed in the current scenario of globalization and commercialization.

Though, Paulette have returned for a supporting role in *River of Smoke* but waylaid outside Canton, as she is only a passive character and a voice that remains in the background. The reader gets information of her whereabouts in parts and indirectly through epistolary exchanges with Robin. Many chapters in the novel start from Robin’s longwinded, voluble and comical letters. It is Neel who reappears from the earlier novel and as character focalizer always stands with the omnipresent narrator, commanding much space in the novel. Neel, the royal land owner of past, has escaped a prison sentence in Mauritius and becomes a munshi in Bahram’s employ in Canton.

The male voices get dominance over the female voices in the second part of the trilogy as trade for centuries is thought to be the monopoly and domain of males. So, it necessitates the narrative to incorporate and project male voices on the front stage. Under such historical upheavals and circumstances there are the mute voices of those characters of mixed parentage whose lives are badly affected and sometimes shattered. Zachary Reid has to conceal his background and observe imperial power dynamics. The other one is Ah Fatt, the illegitimate son of Bahram and a Cantonese boat-woman, dangling between India and China and trying to find his the connection between the two. Opium can just provide a brief solace though repeatedly threatening Ah Fatt’s life. Both are the products of that period in history which has entrapped in its paw their whole life. There is no way out and they have to live this imposed life without questioning.

There is only one character, the half-Egyptian and half-Armenian Zadig Karabedian who is more successful in managing his identity than anyone else while shifting between cultures. He is a respectful outsider who takes pains to learn foreign languages. He abides by the rules and thus saves himself from all troubles. In this sense,
he is very different from the shrewd British opium traders as he is far more sensitive to
the dictates of his heart quite opposite to Bahram, his friend and confident. Zadig, as
class character focalizer, voices the other major issue central to the novel: the gospel of free
trade. He has a clean consciousness and as he profits substantially less, he assumes less
risk. The other traders assert the ‘morality’ of free trade despite the known
destructiveness of opium; somehow they see no conflict and no hypocrisy. Zadig’s voice
appears to represent author’s perspective who advocates the positive aspects of trade
which brings far living people together.

Ghosh mixes both the dramatic techniques of ‘telling’ and ‘showing’ to make his
narrative a true representation of the historical period of China in 1838. He gets
involved in presenting different voices through shifting focalization to describe the same
event and situation. The issue of surrender of opium cargoes is perceived through many
class character focalizers presenting different voices of traders and British officials. Here in
mimesis form of narration the whole scenario is reflected. Mr. Slade’s reaction is quite
noticeable as he says: “Are we frogs that we should throw up our arms in surrender at the
first hint of trouble” (514). Dent reacts:

‘I am completely of a mind with Mr. Slade; Commissioner Lin’s demand
amount to a straightforward act of robbery . . . What years to attempt
negotiation have failed to achieve will be quickly settled by a few
gunboats and a small expeditionary force.’ (516-17)

Bahram who is generally mute in these meetings explodes:

If you give in now, this man will win—this Commissioner. He will win
without harming a hair on our heads without touching a weapon . . . he
will win by writing these things, . . . he will win by writing these what do
In ‘telling’ mode of narration the omnipresent narrator becomes the first introducer to most of the characters or events. Here the presence of authorial intrusive voice (as an authentic voice) has a great role as the writer introduces in the course of narrative certain edicts and letters which are taken directly from the authentic historical sources by the writer while presenting true voices from history. Thus, wherever in the narrative the omnipresent narrator is not a suitable voice to do justice with narration or unable to project and maintain the purity of its objective of concrete narrative, Ghosh relies more on original voices and documentation from history. Ghosh knows very well as to whom to project as narrative voice and when, where and how. The tone and tempo of the beginning of Lin’s letter marks the intense research on the part of the author. This also increases the reliability of the narrator as he is assisted by the translator who reads the original document send by Lin, the Commissioner:

“‘Proclamation to Foreigners from the Imperial Commissioner, His Excellency Lin Zexu. . . .’”

“‘Are you foreigners grateful for the favours shown you by the Emperor? You must then respect our laws . . . . How does it happen then that you bring opium to our central land, chousing people out of their substance and involving their very lives in destruction?’” (431)

In the end of the narrative, instead of a translator Neel himself reads commissioner’s letter written to Queen Victoria and then reaches for a page of his ‘unfinished Chrestomathy’(542). The omnipresent narrator narrates:

Turning it over, on impulse, he translated a few passage into Bengali.

‘The Way of Heaven is fairness to all . . . ., but the Way of Heaven holds good for you as for us, and your instincts are not different from ours; for nowhere are there men so blind as not to distinguish between what brings
life and what brings death, between what brings profit and what does harm. . .

We have heard that England forbids the smoking of opium . . . is it not wrong to send it to another nation? . . . You . . . would not do to others that which you would not others should do to yourself.’ (542-43)

The reader along with the audience in the narrative is at the same position when such translations appear in the narrative as authentic voices from history. They are bound to get meaning out of some retrospection. This makes the text more and more reader oriented and open up the space for innovative readers. It helps the reader to understand history from vantage point of all those who are involved with or affected by opium trade directly or indirectly. Very humbly, Commissioner Lin asks Queen Victoria in his letter:

‘Better then to forbid the smoking of opium then would be to forbid the sale of it, and, better still, to prohibit the production of it, which is the only way of cleaning the contamination at its source. So long as you do not take upon yourselves to forbid the opium but continue to make it and tempt the people of China to buy it, you will be showing yourselves careful of your own lives, but careless of the life of other people . . . . Such conduct is repugnant to human feeling and at variance with the Way of Heaven’. (543)

The use of such edicts, memorials, translations and letters marks the presence of reliable voice of the author in the narrative.

The novel is narrated mainly by an omniscient narrator in third person past tense and by character narrator Robin Chinnery in first person in epistolary form of narration. There is change in point of view and very frequently it shifts from Deeti to Neel, in the first chapter. In the second chapter, it shifts among Neel, Ah Fatt, Bahram and Zadig Bey and then for a very short period to Paulette and Fitcher in the same chapter. This shifting
of focalization occurs very frequently in the third section presenting the history of opium war period in Canton as each focalizer has his own way to perceive the events and then to represent these events in his own perspective.

Part one ends with dramatic meeting among Bahram and Zadig Bey and the real historical figure Napoleon Bonaparte in the past that is presented through analepsis. They talk at length about Canton factories, history of Chinese tea business with England and the reasons behind trading opium from India to China under the British. The General is shocked to know the whole story as he reacts: “Started? Commence? You mean this trade has not always existed?” (173). The narrator suddenly gives the reader a chance to peep into the mind of a famous historical figure Napoleon when he comments: “Quelle ironie! . . . What an irony it would be if it were opium that stirred China from her sleep” (174).

The scenario of opium war is reflected through different voices of character focalizers. The narrator in the novel overviews the scenes from the Anahita, the Redruth, the Pearl River, Canton and also from the important meetings of officials and traders held time and again to discuss their strategies against the Chinese empire. This presents the real temperament of pre-war scenario. There is the feeling of chaos, fear, danger and uncertainty that pervades the narrator’s description of the whole atmosphere of Canton that is also reflected in Dent’s low voice:

‘You must know, Barry,’ he said in a low voice, ‘that we are facing a crisis of unprecedented magnitude. . . . It is in the nature of tyranny for tyrants to be seized by fancies, and it is clear that this one will stop at nothing to enforce his whim: arrests, raids, executions – the monster is willing to use every instrument of oppression that is available to him.

(240)

Section two ‘Canton’ begins with Robin Chinnery’s letter to Paulette in an epistolary mode of narration. Robin Chinnery, in continuous flow, writes letters to his
childhood friend Paulette. The first letter is written on Nov. 7, 1838 from Markwick’s Hotel Canton. The first person narration in present tense without any interference of omnipresent narrator along with the third person narration of main plot by omnipresent narrator is used alternatively throughout the narrative.

The stories in the novel are sometimes told and retold through different voices for the same event. Amitav Ghosh has not limited the issue from history to merely one or two narrators but there are continuous shifts in narrators and focalizers. The whole glimpse of Canton is presented through omnipresent narrator from the perspectives of different character focalizers Bahram, Zadig Bey, Neel, Robin Chinnery, the traders, and even British and Chinese officials. Most of the information narrated by Robin Chinnery in his letters to Paulette are focalized by Zadig Bey, his neighbour in Markwick’s Hotel, who is the main source of information for him in Canton and aware of all the “gup-shup” which “tai-pans are at odd with each other . . . ” (212). Time and again the focalizer’s identity is marked through the expressions like ‘Mr. Karabedian says’ (213, 214, 215, 216) ‘according to Mr. Karabedian’, etc. (216). Zadig Bey is in direct contact with Bahram, Neel and Charles who are his main sources of information imparting and sharing detailed account of all happenings of chamber meetings and other important events. However, Robin Chinnery has his own observations too as character narrator and focalizer. He often mentions a character’s name, some place or an event and then the narrative flows smoothly discussing the related issues to a great length. Chinnery’s letters describe about Whampoa, the island Honam, Pearl River –‘a floating bustee’ with its shores, rows of sampans, shop boats, ‘Fanqui Town’, ‘British Factory’, ‘Jackass Point’, and ‘the Maidan’.

Robin Chinnery’s letters mirror not only the atlas, the landscape and the geography of Canton but also capture the mood of the town that changes continuously
with the change in political and historical scenario. In the beginning, Chinnery’s letters depict everything to be quite smooth as he expresses: “I do believe there is no place like it on earth so small and yet so varied where people from the far corners of the earth must live . . . .” (185). But the same place ‘Maidan’ takes a different colour with change in historical scenario as Chinnery focalizes the same place in the end of the novel:

Something appalling had happened in the city and a great mob had poured into Fanqui-town; this time there were no troops at hand to control them and the crowd was bent on destruction. I saw men running into the Maidan with flaming torches; they broke into the factories and set fire to the godowns . . . From the top I looked down and saw a line of flames leaping above the river; the factories were on fire and they burned through the night. In the morning . . . I saw that Fanqui-town had been reduced to ashes . . . (550)

There is continuous shift of focus from one event to another due to change in political scenario. This change is focalized not only through one character but also through many voices and character focalizers. The same Maidan just like other places changes, when there is change in events and when considered from different vantage points.

The writer uses images and symbols also, as narrative devices to present the inner voices of the characters. He gives Bahram’s image of falling ‘face-forward into a heap of dung like sludge’ then ‘his clothes drenched in the muddy sludge from the tip of his turban to the hem of his ankle-length angrakha: inside his black leather shoes’, ‘opium was squelching between his toes, the stuff on his lips and his mouth’, and ‘head filled with the giddying smell of opium’ that ‘in his eyes, ears, his nose, his wind pipe, it was as if he were drowning. . . .’(30-31). Here the fall symbolically voices the real fall of
Bahram, which the omnipresent narrator presents through Bahram as he remembers in interior monologues and stream of consciousness manner, all his relations at this moment just like a person who is very near to his death:

There was opium in his eyes, his ears, his nose, his windpipe—it was as if he were drowning, and in that instant many faces flashed past his eyes—that of his wife Shireenbani, in Bombay, and of their two daughters; of his mistress, Chi-Mei who had died some years before . . . and of the son he had with her. (31)

In the end, in mimesis mode of narration the omnipresent narrator again shows Bahram’s inner feelings:

It is only money, Bahram-bhai. Soon you will recover your losses.

The money is the least of it, Zadig Bey.

What is it then?

Bahram could not speak; he had to stop and choke back a sob.

Zadig Bey, he said in a whisper, I gave my soul to Ahriman . . .

and it was all for nothing. Nothing. (520)

These are the voices from his heart; he is not able to speak further ‘as tears come to his eyes’ while talking to Zadig Bey when he thinks to surrender his whole opium. Ironically, the reader finds the same Baharm with different point of view previously in the narrative, convincing his father-in-law to begin his business of opium:

But look at the world around us; look at how it is changing. . . . Look at all the money that people are making from selling rum and gin. Are they any better than our own toddy and wine and sharaab? No, but people want them, Opium is just like that. . . . And it is such a thing that once people start using it they can’t stop; the market just gets larger and larger (51).
Ghosh has written *River of Smoke* as historical novel that voices the issues which are still prevalent in the present time affecting the societies and people of different countries. Ghosh talks about the birth of capitalism and the horrible opium production still going on today. The major issues as we observe in the present era are that of social, geopolitical and economic. There are the problems of immigration, recession, terrorist attack, war, corruption, drug addiction and many others. The issues like these are not without their birth pangs—called globalization, commercialization, etc. There shouldn’t be any surprise that historical fiction might be an appropriate and important mode to understand the issues of the present day. Thus, *River of Smoke* is one of the most inspired explorations and careful systematic research of global encounters through multiple voices by a twenty first century writer Ghosh.

As far as the question of inscribed reader in Ghosh's novels is concerned, it becomes very clear that all his novels are divergent. It can be said that the inscribed reader in the early novels like *The Shadow Lines*, *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome* is an intellectual or literary person who could comprehend and follow the intricate patterns and voices in these novels but in the later novels *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide*, *Sea of Poppies*, and *River of Smoke*, the inscribed reader can also be a person who has not necessarily a literary background.

In *River of Smoke*, the cosmopolitanism of past history of opium trade is best illustrated by an unparalleled richness of language of the period. To project the voices from history, Ghosh inter-mingles several Indian tongues along with the Anglo Indian diction of the ruling class. This depicts his striving for accuracy and taking delight in the word play to present the real voices and draw vivid pictures and images of historical events of the period. He also simulates Laskari the *‘Lingua franca’* of Laskars, the ocean sailors.
From the above analysis of the narrative voice, it becomes very clear that Amitav Ghosh is widely divergent in his novels as far as his experimentation with the narrative voice is concerned. There is presence of excellent novelist in Ghosh which becomes evident through the narrative strategies deployed by him. Ghosh, like his contemporary Indian writers in English, possesses a mature view on Indian reality and sensibility. He has deftly handled new themes like alienation, displacement, rootlessness, existentialism, etc. by experimenting new narrative techniques to express these ideas. After examining and finding the relation between narrative events and how they are narrated in the discourse, it can be concluded that Ghosh is a versatile novelist.