Chapter-III
Narrating the Nation

In ‘Whose Imagined Community?’ Partha Chatterjee identifies the act of autonomous forms of imagination of the community. He also discusses its subsequent enlargement to form the idea of the full grown nation. This involves the re-construction of the ‘family’ and the newly defined ‘femininity’ within it. This act falls under the larger project of championing the inner domain of ‘national’ culture (its ‘spiritual’ grains as against the ‘materialist-West’) in the agenda of the rising nationalism and its accompanying discourse. In the previous chapter we have discussed how the ‘woman-question’ is dialogised and codified in literary modes within the textual plane of Tagore's major novels. In the present chapter we shall take up the other important issue of the ‘nationalist’ agenda — that of ‘narrating the nation’, its literary representation within the fictional plane of Tagore’s texts.

We begin with Gora. Homi K. Bhabha in his essay ‘DissemiNation’ gives some kind of a list of literary texts where the ‘nation’ is present as a ‘metaphor’. I want to add Tagore’s Gora to that list. The search for the motherland by the protagonist is one central motif in the text. By a detailed discussion of this novel I shall try and come to an understanding of what Bhabha calls ‘the performativity of language in the narratives of the nation’.

The first sentence of Homi K. Bhabha’s ‘Introduction’ to the book Nation and Narration reads, ‘Nations; like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye.’ Notwithstanding the extremely metaphorical nature of Bhabha’s comment, it can serve as a possible starting-point of a postcolonial reading of a major novel written during the period of the Raj in which ‘India – the nation’ finds a very prominent place. The vast space of the country, in Gora, is transformed into some kind of a symbolical space from where and for which the discourse of nationalism can be enunciated in the idioms of ‘horizontal society – many as one – people’ in a narrative of homogeneous, visual time of the ‘nation’ which is to be fully realized ‘in the mind’s eye’.

Before we move to the actual study of the text, let me introduce very briefly Bakhtin’s idea of the ‘chronotope’ as it would come handy in my analysis of the
novel. Bakhtin introduces his concept of ‘chronotope’ in his long essay, ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics’:

We will give the name chronotope (literally, ‘time space’) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics . . . We are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time [time as the fourth dimension of space].

. . . The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative.

We cannot help but be strongly impressed by the representational importance of the chronotope. Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible; the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins . . . It is precisely the chronotope that provides the ground essential for the showing-forth, the representability of events . . . the chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a centre for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel . . . Such is the representational significance of the chronotope.

. . . Out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the sources of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text).

The above-quoted comments are a testimony to the intertwined relationship that exists between the synchrony of poetics, a spatial science and the diachrony of history, a radically temporal form of knowledge (the subtitle of Bakhtin’s monograph ‘Notes toward a historical poetics’, is to be noted). It must be mentioned that Bakhtin not only uses chronotope as a unit of narrative analysis, a ‘time / space’ figure, but also he incorporates within his concept a dimension of correlation between the cultural environment out of which texts emerge and choice of particular chronotopes by the author for a novel. Bakhtin, however, categorically denies that there is a direct ‘realistic’ reflection of the experienced world in literature. According to him, when a man is in art, he is not in life, and vice versa. It would be safer to say that
literary chronotopes are highly sensitive to historical change: different societies and periods result in different chronotopes both inside and outside literary texts. There exists a correlation, highly complex and multilayered in nature, between a particular, historical intra-textual world and an equally particularized extra-textual world. So, we should always keep in mind that the means by which any presumed plot transforms a story will depend not only on formal (‘made’) features in a given text, but also on generally held conceptions of how time and space relate to each other in a particular culture at a particular time. This brings us close to our present venture – the postcolonial study of a text which was composed in a cultural environment; an environment hugely influenced by the colonial encounter between the British imperialism and the rising Indian nationalism. Thus, study of such a text will hopefully prove that a particular world-view shares a symbiotic relationship with the chronotopic manifestation present in a text produced inside that world-view.

**Gora – Mythical Time of the ‘Nation’ and the Urban Space of a Colonial Metropolis**

In the concluding section of his monograph ‘Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel’ Bakhtin writes, ‘. . . this world the world that *creates* the text for all its aspects — the reality reflected in the text, the authors creating the text . . . readers who recreate and in so doing renew the text – participate equally in the creation of the represented world of the text.’\(^{10}\) He further clarifies his point thus — ‘Out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and *created* chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text).’\(^{11}\) Seen from this perspective, ‘chronotope’ can be said to provide a means to explore the complex, indirect and always mediated relation between art and life. For example, in nineteenth-century French novels a ‘fundamentally new space’ opens up in literature, the ‘space of parlors and salons’.\(^{12}\) This newly-opened possibility can be explained to a certain extent by the peculiar importance such space assumed in Paris at that particular time. In fact, Bakhtin ascribes a kind of symbiotic relationship between the chronotopes of life and art: ‘The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of . . . readers.’\(^{13}\) This comment
of Bakhtin makes room for a tripartite relationship that would exist in a proper
chronotopic study of a novel; between the real-life chronotope and the chronotope of
the art and also the chronotope of the re-creative perceptions of criticism. *Gora*, the
text in question, was written in the first decade of the twentieth century — a period
when nationalist discourse was fast coagulating around the newly-formulated idea of
the ‘nation’. So, it is necessary to cast a quick glance at the real life chronotope of
Tagore’s times in relation to which the chronotope of *Gora* emerges.

In his discussion of Calcutta, the city of Bengali, *Bhadralok* nationalist activists,
— ‘The City Imagined : Calcutta of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’, 14
Sumit Sarkar classifies different regions of the city and their socio-cultural
environments which were responsible for the development of the Bengali mentalité:
‘The city in many important respects was, and remains, not one but many, distinct in
residential areas, languages and cultures, self-images, but interacting in everyday life
in relationships of inequality — and occasional conflict.’ 15 Sarkar demarcates three
major segments of the metropolitan space of the city – *Sahebpara*, the ‘heterogeneous
intermediate zone’ and the ‘Calcutta of the Bengalis’. In the nineteenth century, the
third segment lay to the north and north-east of the ‘intermediate zone’, a zone
situated somewhat at the centre of the city. While the first segment was a clearly
discernible symbol of political supremacy, a fact reflected by the colour of the skin of
the inhabitants of this zone, the second segment was primarily dominated by the
enterprising *Marwaris* who rose to become the main subordinate agents of the British
business firms and to whose hands Bengali merchant princes had to give away the
‘commerce’ of the city. This zone was the economic heartland of the city. The third
zone was inhabited by the Bengalis, predominantly Hindu, with the proportion of
upper castes (*Brahmins, Kayasthas, and Vaidyas*) higher than most other parts of
Bengal. This was primarily the zone of the middle-class (*madhyabitta*) *bhadralok*
world which situated itself below the aristocracy of *dewans* and *baniyas* but above the
lesser folk who had to soil their hands with manual labour in countryside or town.
This middle class was the only class which went for the colonial education in a big
way as their status of small scale rentiers of land hardly gave them enough financial
support. For this reason they had to equip themselves for the professions of teacher,
journalist, government official, or clerk. The *bhadralok* culture was formulated by this
middle-class and the English-educated, ‘enlightened’ upwardly mobile Bengali elites.
The spirit of ‘nationalism’ grew out of this culture. It is extremely interesting to note that Calcutta ‘the imagined city’ of the superior Bengali culture was in a strictly ‘spatial’ sense out of bounds for the middle-class people who were struggling to maintain a decent life-style – after they gave up the economic supremacy to the non-Bengalis along with the political supremacy already in charge of the British. The major areas of the city whose cultural inheritance, the Bengalis thought, lay with them were absolutely alien to the middle-class and over which they had no control. The city became a symbol of colonial hegemony, brute coercive drives of the rulers, in the form of physical terror, epitomised by the British sergeants or the temporal alienation due to the ruthless, disciplinary motives of the British mercantile firms with their strict insistence on duty-hours and rigorous following of the ‘clock time’: a phenomenon, which the Bengali clerks simply abhorred. The spatial dispossession from the important localities of the city resulted in a wish to get away from the chronotopic sphere from Calcutta and search for alternative reality.16

This brings us to the other important feature of the ‘chronotope’ – the concept of time. A number of cultural historians and social scientists have dealt with the nationalist conception of ‘time’ in the colonial age – a conception which was deeply influential in any indigenous attempt of writing history for the motherland or creative writing targeted at the educated middle-class.17 Despite the differences in their arguments, on one point almost all of them agree. It is the presence of the mythical perception of time, a feature present in the Indian conception of ‘time’. This was diametrically opposite to the historico-calendrical time of the Western civilization conceived largely in the idioms of ‘progress’ and ‘modernity’. In the field of creative writing, Meenakshi Mukherjee in her discussion ‘Purana to Nutana’ showed how the newly-risen genre, like the novel, which was primarily a ‘Western’ import also imbibed the traditional mythical view of time within its structure; a view which was not linear but cyclical in nature.18

The mythical conception of time became largely instrumental in the nationalist discourse’s ‘strand of immemorialism’ necessary for developing the idea of ‘nation’ – an act of temporal telescoping which laid claim for the antiquity of India – the ‘nation’. Sudipta Kaviraj in his essay ‘The Imaginary Institution of India’ notes the importance of mangal-kavyas and their narration of the mythical world in this regard. In order to dissect the narrative strategies of the formation of a ‘nation’ he quotes
Antonio Gramsci’s comments on a phase of the invention of Italian nationalism, quite similar to that of Indian nationalism, ; ‘. . . History was political propaganda, it aimed to create national unity — that is, the nation — from the outside and against tradition, by basing itself on literature. It was a wish, not a move based on already existing conditions.’ The ‘invention of tradition’ (to use one of Hobsbawm’s famous phrases) had to be a collective narrative in order to be effective. Kaviraj writes: ‘For this is a thought-form which is by definition collective, its syllables can be uttered only by a collective subject or on its behalf, to use the Foucauldian trope of enunciation.’ The collective narrative with the purpose of inventing a tradition opens up a new space for the ‘imagined’ — the space occupied by a ‘collective self’ — the ‘we’. In Bengal, since the ‘we’ of the Bengali intellectual turned out to be a rather parochial thing in the fight against the injustice of the mighty British empire, a process of widening the ‘collective self’ set in. Kaviraj writes, ‘. . . Bengalis entering into narrative contract with communities who had nothing really to do with them in the past, constantly gerrymandering the boundaries of their national collective self.’ The Rajputs, the Marathas, the Sikhs – all gradually came to secure a place in the new ‘we’ – which came to be coterminous with the land of India – the ‘nation-space’ inhabited by ‘its’ people. This new narrative of ‘constructed’ ‘nation space’, however, spoke in the idiom of the ‘India as an antiquity’. The chronotope of the narrative of Indian ‘newly-risen’ nationalism, therefore, has the curious space-time combination of a vast land of millions of people – the ‘we’ and the ‘time immemorialness of an old tradition’. To quote Kaviraj:

National groups, although they are *gesellschaften* must at least in the romantic period of their rise against foreign control, present themselves to themselves . . . as *gemeinschaft*. It is at one level a coalition of group interests which wishes to merge into an overwhelming combination against the ruling power; but apparently it must pretend . . . that it is an immemorially ancient community. Actually, it must be a bond of secular interests, but in ideology it must be represented as a mystic unity of sentiments.

We have, therefore, come a long way from the claustrophobic world of the British merchant offices, situated in the white-dominated metropolitan world of Calcutta and the relentless ‘clock-time’ of chakri (job). We have arrived at the ‘pedagogic’
chronotope of the ‘nation’ – its ‘mytho-religious idea of time’ (to use Dipesh Chakrabarty’s phrase) and the idea of space of millions of Indians in a land of rivers, mountains, forests and broad fields – the metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity – the chronotope of Bharatmata (‘mother India’). And the historical period in question – is the ‘Swadeshi’ period – the few, dizzy inspiring years during 1905-1908 when the middle-class Bhadralok seemed on the point of gaining command over the alien city, through struggle. Sumit Sarkar writes, ‘Swadeshi Calcutta, predictably, had its principal spatial location in the middle-class and Hindu quarters to the north of intermediate zone, along with Bhowanipur and Kalighat – but there were some penetrations into other areas and social levels.’

Now, let us begin the discussion of the literary chronotope of the text and see in it how reflections of the motif of ‘narrating the nation’ get formulated in it. In the concluding section of his essay Bakhtin writes:

In the novels of Stendhal and Balzac a fundamentally new space appears in which novelistic events may unfold — the space of parlors and salons (in the broad sense of the word) . . . this is where dialogues happen, something that acquires extra-ordinary importance in the novel, revealing the character, “ideas” and “passions” of the heroes . . . In the parlors and salons . . . is found the barometer of political and business life, political, business, social, literary reputations are made and destroyed. . .

. . . Most important in all this is the weaving of historical and socio-public events together with the personal and even deeply private side of life . . . Here the graphically visible markers of historical time as well as of biographical and everyday time are concentrated and condensed; at the same time they are intertwined with each other in the tightest possible fashion, fused into unitary markers of epoch.

From the above comments, we can isolate three main features — chronotopic space of salons and parlors, extensive use of dialogues to unravel ‘ideas’ and characters and the weaving of socio-cultural time of a particular epoch with the biographical and everyday time in the lives of the characters – of the Salon novel. Even a cursory reading of Tagore’s text Gora reveals the authorial insistence on dialogues. There are innumerable instances of long conversations and hard-fought debates present in the text. There are a number of pairs in the novel between whom
extensive exchanges of dialogues take place; Gora-Binoy, Gora-Paresh Babu, Gora-Sucharita, Gora-Haranbabu, Sucharita-Binoy, Sucharita-Paresh Babu, Gora-Anandamoyi, Anandamoyi-Sucharita, Anandamoyi-Binoy. With the help of dialogues a number of contemporary issues like the ‘real’ nature of India - the nation, Hinduism and its quintessential qualities, Brahmoism, the role of women in the society, casteism, patriotism, tradition and modernity are raised and dialogized. Unlike his other two overtly ‘political’ novels, Ghare Baire and Char Adhyay, Tagore does not directly deal with the contemporary political issues – the raging one being the ‘Divide of Bengal’ in 1905. (Although the novel was written in the last years of the first decade of the twentieth century, the temporal background of the story is set in the last quarter of the nineteenth century) Nevertheless, it is the dialogic mode of narration present in the text that condenses and concentrates the unitary markers of the epoch.

This brings us to the third important chronotopic feature of the ‘Salon novel’ – the ‘social’ space manifested through the space of salons and parlors and its counterpart in our text – the newly-opened social space of Brahmo majlish and adda (these Bengali words are difficult to translate for their peculiar Bengali ambience – ‘society’, ‘meeting’ would not be good translations). This is the space where Brahmo-women gradually came out into the open and began to meet members of the opposite sex in social gatherings. Women were even taking part in politico-cultural reinvention of rituals like rakhi-bandhan in the open streets of Calcutta.25

It would not be altogether wrong to transpose the importance of ‘salons’ in the French ‘public’ sphere – where cultural and social trends largely originated and fought for supremacy with other forms of cultural formulations – to the formation of Bengali cultural discourse in the newly-opened ‘public sphere’ of addas, majlishes which took place mostly in well-to-do Brahmo homes, offices of newspapers and journals or political organizations. Many of the long dialogues take place in the Brahmo household of Paresh Babu in the text of Gora.26 The new ‘civic-space’ of adda or majlish was, therefore, soon turned into a discursive field where the Bengali bhadralok discourse gradually took shape. So, it is the new civic-space of adda during the practice of socializing among educated bhadraloks of both Hindu and Brahmo communities – usually taking place in Brahmo houses, that opens up a new chronotopic space where the narrative of the ‘nation’ can unfold and the important social, religious, familial and cultural markers of the ‘constructed’ nation can be
enunciated and legitimized to a great extent. ‘India’ as a ‘nation’ unfolds in the chronotopic plane of this novel primarily as a pedagogic subject. The feel of the nation, its specific form, its people, its culture, its religion, its temporal existence, – the ‘nation’ as an idea (to use Benedict Anderson’s oft-quoted phrase, ‘nation – an imagined community’) – all are communicated to the reader by a multi-nuanced and multi-perspective grand-narrative. Let us look at a few such dialogues where ‘nation’ the discursive object opens up:

. . . Binoy said: Tell me; is India very real, absolutely clear, to you? India is in your thoughts day and might, but what way do you think of her? . . . (Gora) said: “As the captain of a ship when he is out on the ocean keeps in mind the port across the sea, both while at work and during his leisure, so is India in my mind at all times.” . . . “I may miss my task; I may sink and drown, but that port of a great destiny is always there. That is my India in its fullness — full of wealth, full of knowledge, full of righteousness. Do you mean to say that such India is nowhere?” 27

Gora’s voice seems to be an almost perfect echo of the dominant discourse of the rising nationalist consciousness. The ‘imagined’ nature of ‘India – the nation’ is quite evident from the figurative manner of speaking and the list of attributes which were attached to that assumed perfection of the country. During his discussion of roles played by European Romanticism and Hindu or Buddhist perceptions on the nationalist consciousness in India and the role of ‘imagination’ in it, Dipesh Chakrabarty, writes, in the section entitled ‘Imagination as a problem in the History of Nationalism’ in his essay ‘Nation and Imagination’: ‘. . . the nation of India . . . is not only ‘imagined’, it may have been darshaned as well’ 28 The search for an alternative reality in the times of an alien rule has a clear manifestation in the act of ‘imagining’ a nation. Sonar Bangla – ‘golden Bengal’, the ideal, the perfect, the beautiful, is such a formulation. This ‘nation – seen by an inner vision’ is situated outside the historical flow of ‘everyday-time’ (pratyahik — the everyday). This nation would also serve as the manifestation of the nitya or the chirantan (the eternal) as well. Let us look at another comment of Gora and see how the ‘imaginary’ nature of the nation comes to light:

Gora went on: “Here where we read and study, where we go about seeking employment, slaving away from ten to five without rhyme or reason —
because we call this falsehood of some evil genie India, is that any reason why 350 millions of people should honour what is false and go about intoxicated with the idea that this world of falsity is a real world? How can we gain any life, for all our efforts, out of this mirage? . . . But there is a true India, rich and full, and unless we take our stand there, we shall not be able to draw upon the sap of life either by our intellect or by our heart. (p.18)

In the above extract, there are clear signs of a tendency to get away from the chronotopic world of ‘colonial reality’ and create an alternative chronotopic world of the ‘nation’. Throughout the novel this drive is consistently present; only the ideas regarding the exact ideological nature of this ‘construct’ and its specific religio-cultural markers are ‘dialogised’ by the different points of view of different characters and long exchanges of dialogues between them. In this way, within the chronotopic time and space of addas, informal gatherings of a Brahma house we are offered glimpses of Binoy’s India, Paresh Babu’s India, Sucharita’s India, Anandamoyi’s India and of course Gora’s India. Gora’s ‘India’ is always abuzz with the noises of a national collective self’ — ‘350 millions of people’ – the people who are the inhabitants of the nation – another common inclusionist strategy of ‘nationalism’; “Those whom you call illiterate are those to whose party I belong. What you call superstition that is my faith! So long as you do not love your country and take your stand beside your own people, I will not allow one word of abuse of the motherland from you.” (p.51) The religious contours of Gora’s India are overtly Hindu. The ‘imagined’ India is, according to him is a ‘Hindu’ nation but he uses the word ‘Hindu’ along with its widest connotations and the ‘colonial’ India is to be rejuvenated by the arrival of a ‘superman’ Brahmin: “The Hindus are a nation and such a vast nation that their nationality cannot be limited within the scope of any single definition.” (p.294)

— “India wants the Brahmin of firm, tranquil and liberated mind - when once she gets him then only will she be free!” (pp. 87-87)

Paresh Babu’s views about India justly identify the ‘revivalist’ streak dormant in the discursive formations of ‘nationalism’ of Gora with its strong Hindu overtones; “I cannot say that I know India; and I certainly do not know what India wanted for herself, . . . but can you ever go back to the days that are gone? . . . what good can we
do by stretching out our arms in vain appeals to the past?” (p.88), Sucharita’s ‘India’ while retaining the ‘strand of immemorialism’ is much more catholic in texture:

This is a wonderful country! How many thousands and thousands of years had God’s purpose been working to make it surpass all other countries in the world? How many people from other lands have come to make this purpose complete? How many great men have taken birth in our land? . . . What great truths have found utterance here? What great austerities have been performed? From what a variety of standpoints has religion been studied? And how many solutions to the mystery of life have been found in this land? This is our India! (p.360)

Sucharita’s speech is interesting from another point of view. Hers has the function of championing the ‘spiritual’ – the ‘inner’ domain of the ‘East’ — bearing the “essential” marks of cultural identity with which the indigenous ‘nationalism’ tried to fight the narrative of ‘modernity’ and ‘progress’ with which the ‘West’ staked its claim for supremacy. But, so far we have been identifying traces of affinity present in the text of Gora with the discourse of nationalism. But the project of writing the nation has certain inner-contradictions ingrained in it. Let us look at them now.

In his essay ‘DissemiNation’ Homi Bhabha writes:

The people are not simply historical events or parts of a patriotic body politic. They are also a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference, where the claims to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address . . . the people are the historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy . . . the people are also the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principle of the people . . . In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist accumulative temporality of the pedagogical and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative.29

So, the narrative of many as one or the ‘collective-self’ living in the ‘horizontal, homogeneous empty time’ of the constructed ‘nation’ has an inherent contradiction in it — what Bhabha terms as the ‘split between the pedagogical and the performative’. The pedagogy of the discourse of ‘nationalism’ can never contain within it the heterogeneous temporal existence of the people of the nation. In the later part of his
essay, Bhabha argues that official discourse of nationalism, by its very status of ‘constructedness’, opens up the possibility for a ‘minority discourse’ — the discourse of the Other. The task of narrating the nation, in this way, involves a confrontation with the ‘supplementary space of cultural signification’ - be it from the differently constructed voice of women emanating the perspectives of ‘women’s time’ (this is Julia Kristeva’s notion which Bhabha quotes in his essay) or the subaltern existence which threatens to pull down the ‘Civic Imaginary’ of the official discourse (in the case of our present text, the Bhadralok discourse)

Within the chronotopic plane of the novel the attack on the official version of the nationalist discourse with the predominance of Hindu idioms in it comes from Anandamoyi: “I have long ceased to take pride in my caste . . . Aren’t Christians human beings? If you alone are the elect of God, why has He made you grovel in the dust first before the Pathans, then before the Moghuls, and now before the Christians?” (p.27) It is she who breaks free from the limits of nationalist discourse and utters a counter-discourse of universal humanism: “What after all is the difference, my son, between Brahmo and orthodox Hindu? There is no caste in men’s hearts – there God brings men together and there He Himself comes to them.” (p.183) Anandamoyi’s India, thus, ruptures the chronotopic formation of the ‘imaginary India’ that has been so persistently foregrounded by the dialogues uttered by Gora. In the words of Bhabha, ‘Being obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification’ — Anandamoyi’s consciousness is one such liberating forms of cultural identification.

But the ‘act of forgetting’ which Bhabha identifies in the narrative of ‘nation’ most often gets registered in the chronotopic plane of literary text. This is perhaps one clear sign of the autonomy of ‘artistic reality’ which does not conform to Fredric Jameson’s idea of looking at all kinds literature of the Third World as some kind of a ‘nationalist allegory’. In Gora the ‘minority discourse’ which is usually situated in the margins of nation-space — is uttered by the subaltern barber who lives in a Mohammedan village and who has adopted an unfortunate Muslim boy whose family has been devastated by the British Indigo planters. When asked about such an extremely unorthodox act of adopting a Mussalman boy, the poor Barber replies; “What’s the difference, sir? We call on Him as Hari, they as Allah, that’s all.” (p.133)
It is, in fact, the plights of the subaltern-India, represented in the chronotopic-space of the novel which opens up during Gora’s travels through the countryside and his involvements in some forms of social work in the neighbourhood that bring him in touch with the lower strata of his beloved country — that most clearly subvert the autonomy of the imagining of the bhadralok’s alternative reality, manifested in the narration of the ‘nation as an imagined community’. In an earlier chapter I have discussed, at length, the ‘Nanda-episode’ (Chapter XVII of Gora) which serves the function of ‘split’ between the pedagogic programme of the ‘nation-people’ and performative attributes of the lived existence of ‘real people’. It is, in fact, the realization of this ‘split’ that helps Gora overcome his euphoric empathization with the ‘India’ of his imagination:

Now I have truly the right to serve her, for the real field of labour is spread out before me — it is not a creation of my own imagination — it is the actual field of welfare for the three hundred millions of India’s children! . . . In me there is no longer any opposition between Hindu, Mussalman, and Christian. Today every caste in India is my caste; the food of all is my food! . . . I tried to make that emptiness look more beautiful by decorating with all kinds of artistic work . . . Now that I have been delivered from those fruitless attempts at inventing such useless decorations I feel, Paresh Babu, that I am alive again. (p.406)

This is a most thorough denouncing of the ideational chronotope of nationalism’s ‘Imaginary India’ and its associated discursive formations.

Bakhtin writes, ‘the author-creator, finding himself outside the chronotopes of the world he represents in his work, is nevertheless not simply outside but as it were tangential to these chronotopes’ (italics mine).31 This element of ‘tangentiality’ between the author and the chronotope of his text makes us contemplate why Tagore needed the cross-cultural hybridity of an Irish-man brought up in a colonial environment of Hindu society to subvert the ‘constructed’ chronotope of a ‘nationalist’ India32. This raises questions regarding the ideological position of the author, the production-relations existing at the time of the publication of the book in the print media and also the socio-cultural composition of the existing reading public. But, an enquiry into these areas of research is beside the scope of our attempt.
History may be servitude, history may be freedom.

T. S. Eliot

In certain brief, fleeting moments, with the help of freedom from the narrow periphery of everyday life: a life spent mostly in laughing, crying, attending to the responsibilities in office, – a freedom achieved with the help of a sudden realisation of the activities of the great charioteers of history riding through the highways of the world – we get a real taste of history.

Rabindranath Tagore

It is now a common knowledge that the history-writing project of the nationalist discourse had a well-defined method of selection. The mainstream historians, the narrators of the nation and her history were mostly English-educated middle and upper-class Hindu gentlemen. They, by and large, tried their best to 'forget' the age of the Muslim rule; an age which lasted not less than a couple of centuries; may be a little more. This is largely because, in Meenakshi Mukherjee's words, ‘During the end of the nineteenth century, India's cultural glory became synonymous with Hindu racial pride and the fight against the Muslim rulers became one central motif in the journey to establish national identity.’

This act of 'forgetting' assumed the proportions of, what, in psychoanalytic terms, is called 'repression'. I have already discussed how, in a colonial scenario, in India, the acts of 'narrating the nation' and 'nationalist self-fashioning' had a curious case of simultaneity about them. The deliberate act of repressing the 'Muslim past' in the nation-writing project, therefore, also involved an act of disavowal: the disavowal of an alternative self – a self deeply steeped in Islamic culture. The split between the 'pedagogic' and the 'performative' becomes evident once more when these twin acts of disavowal and repression get recorded, if not in the history-writing project of the official nationalist discourse, in contemporary literature. Literature becomes a significant plane where we get to see, what Sudipta Kaviraj says, ‘Within seemingly homogeneous history there are conflicts between tendencies, the axis and the periphery, the mainstream and the embarrassing fringe, the self and the other.”
In this section I shall take up, not another of Tagore's novels, but, a specimen of a different genre from his prose oeuvre. In order to deal with the literary manifestation of the result of repression in the project of 'narrating the nation' I have selected one of Tagore's more popular stories, 'Hungry Stone', a story written just a few years before Gora, in 1895. I should explain why I choose to call it a 'story' and not refer to it as a 'short-story' like the other stories of the collection Golpoguchho are usually called. In 'Hungry Stone', the narrator and his friend listen to a strange tale from a stranger during a chance encounter in a railway station; a situation somewhat similar to that of Rime of the Ancient Mariner. The storyteller's tale has a Chinese-box like structure; it gradually unfolds in the manner of tale within a tale. But, unfortunately, the listeners do not get to hear a complete string of stories as the train arrives and they get separated from the storyteller. For my argument, the motif of a storyteller telling a tale; a storyteller who is a Scheherazade-like figure, is very important. According to Walter Benjamin, only a storyteller has 'the ability to exchange experiences'; experiences, drawn from distant places and distant times. Benjamin writes, `. . . traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the hand-prints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.' Through tellings and re-tellings of a story experience passes on from generation to generation; the hallmark of any 'oral tradition'. What we understand as modern day 'short story' is far removed from that tradition. Tagore's 'Hungry Stone', in this context, is a tale in which experience of 'two hundred and fifty years', experience of India's close, intricate relationship with the Muslim culture, experience repressed in the dominant nationalist discourse bursts forth. In this connection, regarding the shape in which the experience is captured in the story, I wish to refer to Sigmund Freud's essay, 'The Uncanny' and point out the intricate relationship that, according to Freud, exists between the process of repression and the element called 'uncanny'.

Freud writes:

Uncanny is something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfills this condition . . . Uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.

We all know that 'Hungry Stone' is a story about a haunted house; a house steeped in the country's Muslim heritage. A close encounter of a western-educated 'colonized'
male subject with this house leads to a series of experiences, which, in Freudian terms, may be dubbed as ‘uncanny’. (Interestingly, 'Monihara' and 'Nishithe', the other two stories of Tagore in which the poet deals with 'the uncanny' are also stories in which the presence of the storyteller is of utmost significance.) My basic argument is that this story is a literary manifestation of an important evidence of a significant *aporia* of the nationalist discourse; namely, the repression of the country's Muslim past. Freud teaches us, that a repression, on many occasions, results in a feeling of the uncanny; and the feeling of the uncanny, in turn, leads the 'self' to an encounter with the 'other'. Likewise, in this story, as the male protagonist, is exposed to his 'forgotten' Muslim tradition and culture during his short stay in the Barich palace, he undergoes a quasi-disintegration of his psyche. A split occurs within it. This split is between his western-educated, carefully-fashioned self and his 'disavowed' 'non-rational' uncanny 'double'. Therefore, for me, 'Hungry Stone' is not just another story of the 'fantastic' but an allegory of the 'silences' in the project of 'narrating the nation'; it is about the 'silences' of the nationalist historiography and the 'forgotten double' of the history of our nation.

But, before I enter into a detailed reading of the story let me give a few details about the history of its composition. Tagore spent the summer of 1878 in the Shahibag palace in Ahmedabad as his elder brother was posted in the court there. This experience deeply moved the young mind of the poet. During his stay in the palace he used to spend long hours, all by himself. The Islamic architecture which blended so wonderfully well with the natural surroundings of the palace, the river running close by and an over-all feel of the place gave him a real taste of the essence of his country's rich heritage: an essence, which according to Tagore, ‘... does not let any rupture take place between the past and the present.’ 40 Living in the palace gave Tagore a clear glimpse of such a 'past', a taste of which, in Dipesh Chakrabarty's words, ‘... one would like to have by living inside that past; a past to which the poet would say, making it sit in front of him, “speak up, please speak up.”’ 41 History for the young poet became quite like a living thing. Seventeen long years later, in 'Hungry Stone', Tagore tried to give artistic expression to his experience of living in that palace: so powerful was the hold of the past age on him.

While discussing the 'Gothic chronotope' and the special quality of time represented in it (Bakhtin calls it 'castle time') Bakhtin writes:
The castle is saturated through and through with a time that is historical in the narrow sense of the word, that is, the time of the historical past.

. . . traces of centuries and generations are arranged in it in visible form as various parts of its architecture, in furnishings, weapons, the ancestral portrait gallery, the family archives and in the particular human relationships . . .

History takes visible shape in 'Hungry Stone' too, primarily through detailed descriptions of the palace and how the 'past' is entwined with virtually every object of the palace:

Some two hundred and fifty years ago, Shah Mahmud II had built this palace here, upon this remote and lonely site, as his house of pleasure. At that time, secluded deep within the mansion's cool moist interior, rosewater flowed from fountains in the bathing-chambers; and young Persian women, their hair loosened before their bath, sat on smooth wet stone seats with their bare feet in the clear water of the pool, strumming sitars and singing ghazals in the vineyard . . . The fountains are silent now; there are no songs, and no fair footsteps resound on the white marble . . .

In fact, time in 'Hungry Stone' is of a more complex nature than what Bakhtin labels as 'castle time'. The temporal location which dates back some 250 years, during the heydays of the palace, jostle with the 'here and now' of the cotton revenue-collector of the Nizam's government during colonial times and the 'time immemorial' (What the French historian Fernand Braudel would call 'longue duree') of cosmic prehistory:

A brilliant star shone through an open window: perched high above the dark forested Aravalli Mountains, from its exalted place in the sky millions of leagues away, it fixed its gaze upon the humble Mr. Tax-Collector on his humble camp-cot. (pp. 139-140)

In spite of the fact that the palace quite clearly assumes anthropomorphic proportions in the text a consistent zooming in and out movement between the past and the present is, I think, what sets this story apart from the stereotypical Gothic genre. At the centre of 'Hungry Stone' is an unresolved conflict between the 'colonial chronotope' and the 'gothic' chronotope. This conflict is between the 'fantasy', encoded in an Oriental life-style, full of exotic pleasures, and the harsh 'reality' of a subjugated self, caught in the drudgery of colonial clock-time, full of never-ending
duties of *chakri*. The conflict in the text also assumes psychic proportions as the protagonist is caught between the tussle between the 'pleasure principle' and the 'reality principle', that takes place within his self. The 'super-ego' of rational experiential horizon, encrypted in a colonizer/colonized power equation and the 'id' of a free life, full of sensual pleasures and romance try to, in turn, get control over his 'ego'. His ego gets fractured. Experiences of living in the palace, of the day-time and of the night-time; experiences which are of completely different nature, for him become a drama involving the 'self' and the 'double'. The tax-collector is at a loss to identify which one represents reality for him and which one is his true self:

. . . but it was certain that *I earned four hundred and fifty rupees a month* collecting taxes in the cotton markets of Barich. The thought of my recent trance began to seem ridiculous; sitting down at my lamp-lit camp-table, with a newspaper in my hands, I soon succumbed to laughter. (p.139)

. . . A strange feud arose between my days and my nights. By day, I would take my weary body off to work, heaping curses upon my beguiling nights full of empty dreams. But once evening had set in, it was my workaday daytime existence that seemed trivial, false and absurd. Once evening came, I would feel myself caught in a web of rapture. I would become a different being, a character in *an unrecorded history* of centuries ago. My short English jacket and my tight pantaloons would begin to seem oddly incongruous; with greatest care, I would put on a red velvet fez, loose leggings, a flowered shirt and a long silk *achkan*, with a coloured attar-scented handkerchief. Then, putting away my cigarettes, I would light a great hubble-bubble filled with rosewater, and sink into a high upholstered sofa. (p.141) (Italics mine)

Sudipta Kaviraj, in his essay, 'Laughter and Subjectivity: The Self-Ironical Tradition in Bengali Literature' discusses how the Bengali *bhadralok* (the newly-fashioned nationalist 'self', in our scheme of things), during the rise of the nationalist consciousness, was out to invent a different self in literature, if not nowhere else. He mentions Tagore's poem *Duronto Asha* and says that in search of ingredients for a new self the speaker of the poem even goes to the Bedouins in the Arab desert. Interestingly enough, in our text, there are mentions of the Bedouins:
What Bedouin raider plucked you from your mother's arms like a tender flower from its parent creeper, and carried you off on his lightning-swift horse across the searing sands to the slave market before the royal palace? (p.143)

But, this exotic Oriental setting was very much a part of the mainstream Indian way of life at some stages in Indian history. Architectural monuments, spread all across north India, built during the Muslim rule are obvious examples of that. As a matter of fact, what could be a more obvious example of the overwhelming presence of Muslim culture on Indian mind-scape than the Taj Mahal? Indian 'self' did have a sense of familiarity with his Oriental 'double'.

As I said before, according to Freud, uncanny is something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it. For him, Unheimlich ('unfamiliar') is what was once used to be Heimlich, familiar and the prefix 'un' is the token of repression. In his discussion of 'The Uncanny', with the help of a detailed etymological study of the words Unheimlich and heimlich in various European languages, Freud shows that the words have close association with the idea of home and homelessness. Unheimlich house is likely to be a haunted house. The return of the dead, spirits and ghosts with which we usually associate such houses, our present text being no exception, and which produces an effect of the uncanny are symbolical of what was once familiar and was then repressed and in a subsequent stage made a comeback. With breathtaking insight Freud proves that the haunted house is a symbol of homesickness too: and homesickness, in turn, is symptomatic of cravings for love. In 'Hungry Stone', in the very beginning of his tale, the storyteller makes one statement which is very significant in our present context, ‘Today the palace serves for lonely womanless revenue-collectors like myself.’(p.136) (Italics mine) To love and the desire to be loved, therefore, is one central motif in the story of the uncanny of our storyteller in this text. As his story builds up we get to know how he falls in love with an apparition, who, he thinks, is from Arabia as he declares his feelings for her:

I was besotted with her: it was to meet her that I would roam every night among the alleyways of that labyrinthine dream-world, in the subterranean realm of sleep. (p.142)
The storyteller's desperate longings for the company of this mysterious woman from Arabia become so acute that he begins to consider his immediate reality as nothing less than absurd:

The cotton-revenue accounts lost their urgency, indeed the affairs of the Nizam's entire estate dwindled into insignificance. Everything that was actual and current, everything happening around me – people coming and going, eating and working – seemed utterly mean, trivial, devoid of sense. (p.144)

A number of critics (for example, Dipesh Chakrabarty) have pointed out clear echoes of anti-Benthamite position in Tagore's aesthetic theories as it becomes evident in his idealist romanticism. In the present context, what is significant, however, is a direct conflict between Enlightenment rationality, manifested in the workings of the imperialist machine of which the revenue-collector is a small part and the fantasy world that existed two hundred fifty years ago. Thus, the revenue-collector, in a way, becomes a representative subject of collective longings of a race: a race in search of another epoch. Reference of 'scent of vanished perfumes and pomades' in this text transports, not only the storyteller, but many of us to another world. Walter Benjamin says, 'A scent may drown years in the odour it recalls', and the 'recognition of a scent is more privileged to provide consolation than any other recollection, this may be so as it deeply drugs the sense of time.'

According to Benjamin, in the story-telling tradition, the cardinal point is the possibility for the unaffected listener of reproducing the story; and, for Freud, whatever reminds us of 'the compulsion to repeat' is perceived as uncanny. The story of the haunted palace, is, told over and over again by the storyteller and the narrator. Tagore's story, therefore, has the circular structure of the listener becoming the storyteller as the memory creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening from generation to generation.

It is, however, extremely significant that the 'erudite' storyteller with his Oriental fixation at the end of the story jumps into a first-class compartment and begins his journey with an Englishman as his companion, leaving his hapless listeners in their second-class compartment. For a bilingual, western-educated gentleman the cultural bind of the colonizer remains indelible and the possibility of a worthwhile merger with his Oriental doppelgänger ultimately remains outside his (and that of his race) horizon of expectation. Search for an alternative self remains a mirage: and,
reality, to echo the mad Meher Ali's words, ‘Stay away, stay away. It's a lie; all of it's a lie.’

**He (Shey): All That is Solid Melts into Air**

In Empire, no subjectivity is outside, and all places have been subsumed in a general “non-place.” The transcendental fiction of politics can no longer stand up and has no argumentative utility because we all exist entirely within the realm of the social and the political.

Antonio Negri

He who is one, who is above all colour distinctions, who dispenses the inherent needs of men of all colours, who comprehends all things from their beginning to the end, let Him unite us to one another with the wisdom which is the wisdom of goodness.

The *Svetasvataraopanishad*

Rabindranath spent his entire life in a country that was under foreign rule. Still, his life-long quest was not merely how to end the story of political subjugation and to achieve independence. His goal was greater; it was, in short, to outgrow 'the political' and 'the historical.' He wrote, way back in 1902, in his essay, 'Bharatbarsher Itihaas', ‘To see India, through the foggy film of blood-stained nightmarish-visions is not to see the real India at all.’ He, therefore, fought hard with theories of 'nation-state' and 'citizen-subject'. With amazing consistency, he dialogically engaged with these issues in many of his creative and polemical writings. Hopefully, in my study, I have been able to present some traces of the history of his long engagement with the idea of the nation in his novels and other prose-writings.

Now, in the last section of the final chapter of my thesis, I shall try to show how, through his artistic endeavours, Tagore, has made attempts to rise above 'the political' and 'the historical'; two 'gifts' that colonial India received from western modernity. To draw a line of demarcation between the public sphere ('the political' and 'the historical') and the field of creativity (*srishtikshetra*) was something that Tagore
was trying to achieve throughout his life as poet and creative artist. For him, the goings on in the public sphere with its public ‘history’ – statist activities embroiled in constitutional adjustments – could only touch him as a ‘British subject’; but not ‘as Rabindranath’. Because, he knows that there is the other side to the story. In his 1941 essay, 'Saahitye oitihaasikota' Tagore writes, ‘. . . in his own field of creativity Rabindranath [was] entirely alone’ and ‘tied to no public by history.’ There the light that gilded the treetops for him at dawn had little to do with any ‘statist input owing to the British government’ (British governmenter rashtrik amdani noy). It was the manifestation of the goings on of ‘some mysterious history of my inner soul (antaratma).’

Discussing Tagore's this essay with wonderful philosophical insight, Ranajit Guha writes,

“Mysterious history” and “inner soul”: the creative process could hardly be distanced more from public history and the public space of state affairs. Those phrases stand for the utmost inwardness creativity needs to realize itself in literature. It is not enough for it to see things in a new light. For to see is only to collect material that must be worked into literature.

In order to show how Tagore makes an attempt to outgrow the 'reality' of the 'nation-state' in the realm of literature I shall take up a study of Shey, a fantasy in fourteen chapters. Shey was published in 1937; it was one of his last published works. In this fantasy in which the grandfather Tagore tells stories to the granddaughter Pupe, or Nandini, Tagore's desire to play truant from the society, the world of public history with a record of state-events and the world of 'reality' gets a most consistent manifestation. My attempt will be to show how Tagore's attempts to arrive at a 'post-historicist' position comprise twin strategies. I shall try to see how, through the fantastic tales in Shey, with an apparent intention to encourage a spirit of pure laughter among children without any alloy of intelligence, Tagore hovers between two poles; the poles of social satire and fantasy. On the one hand, in this text there is an attempt to transgress immediate reality. This reality is the social, political and cultural reality of colonial India; a reality which was a part of the larger reality of colonial modernity that involved both the colonizer and the colonized. This attempt is manifested through a thorough denunciation of the absurdity ingrained in the very fabric of society itself and all its most significant markers – subjectivity, ISA's like education, technology, marriage etc. This creates a layer of social satire in the text
which takes the form of nonsense literature in the line of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, famous names in western literature, and of Troilokyonath Mukhopadhyay and Sukumar Ray, closer home. From this angle we notice that Tagore's conflict with 'modernity' takes even the form of a long tirade against 'modernist in art' in this text; in a text which is often classified as a piece of children's literature. On the other hand, the flight of fantasy in the text takes the reader far away from calendrical or clock-time to a temporality which the grandpa calls the 'Age of Truth', a temporality made up of stories that grandpa fabricates for his grandchildren. Grandpa calls this age 'ultra-historic'. In this age all one wants to be is 'a bit of the landscape, stretched over a wide expanse': and knowledge just 'grows of itself, out of being'. In this new country that grandpa creates in Shey men do not say, '. . . we want to create people of our own'; on the contrary, all man declares dreamily is, 'I'd like to try being a sal tree.' In this country, which is outside the folds of the 'nation-state', in the Age of Truth, one can be both Pupu and the cat and this country is a location where the sky is filled 'as it is with the millions of wishes of the earth-bound.'

But, before we enter into the dense, symbolic world of fantasy that Tagore creates in Shey, just a few words about some basic features of fantasy literature. In their book Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults Pamela S. Gates, Susan B. Steffel and Francis J. Molson try to catalogue some basic tendencies and objectives of fantasy literature. I shall mention a few of those; the ones, I think, that are relevant for our discussion of Shey.

Springing from the depths of mythology and the Greek phantasia (making visible), fantasy literature represents our personal need and the universal quest for deeper realities and eternal truth. (p.1)

. . . (f)antasy may involve the systematic assembling of imaginary personalities or the adoption of roles that enables some individuals to evade, if only for a while, a reality they perceive as indifferent or hostile. (p.2)

Fantasy can also be an effective agency for change, renewal, and liberation when, refusing to be bound to the present and past, the visible and physical, and the traditional and established, it plays with what might be, makes what does not yet exist, and elaborates any number of possible futures. (p.6)

Because of its penchant for outrageous what-ifs and its refusal to respect tradition and its trappings, fantasy can be subversive, ripping away facades,
undermining the pillars of orthodoxy, and exposing the special pleading and self-interest often lurking behind convention and respectability. (p.6)

... Whether seen as aesthetic, social, political, or religious, fantasy, put as objectively and simply as possible, is imaginative fiction that can provide alternative realities, allowing us to explore issues of size, time, and space. . . (p.6) (Italics mine)

So, fantasy can be subversive, and can attempt to bring down the pillars of orthodoxy. Through fantasy man can try to evade a reality that he considers as indifferent or hostile. Fantasy, on the other hand, can also serve as means for a quest for deeper realities and eternal truth. We shall talk about this second dimension of fantasy literature later in my essay. But, at first, for non-conformist Rabindranath the fantasy-chronotope that he develops in Shey gives him opportunities to outgrow the immediate reality of colonial modernity. By throwing into disarray the world of reason and logic of the colonial world with a deliberate and no-holds barred use of imagination; imagination which is almost 'hysteric'; Tagore challenges the reality that the 'nation-state' throws up to Rabindranath, the 'British subject'. It is like a journey from the 'historic' to hysteric.\textsuperscript{55} Tagore also takes the opportunity that fantasy literature offers to subvert the evils that he sees in his orthodox, traditional society where caste and creed reigned supreme.

In the very beginning of the text, Tagore takes up one central motif of official history, the creation of the protagonist in the drama of 'civilization', the 'Man'. (In case of the history of the 'nation-state' it is the 'citizen-subject', without whom it will be like staging Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark.):

God, in his wisdom, has created millions and millions of people, but the expectations of those people are far from satisfied. They say, “Now we want to create people of our own.” so as the gods played with their living dolls, people began to play with their own dolls, dolls they had themselves created.\textsuperscript{56}

Like what many storytellers before him have done Tagore too joins them at his granddaughter's command and he declares:

... am working on the making of these make-believe characters. They are only to play with, not answerable to truth or falsehood. . . Many stories start, 'Once there lived a king.” But I began 'There lives a man.”
One night, after ten o'clock, he came into my room. I was reading a book. He said, “Dada, I'm hungry.’

I've heard many stories of princes, but none of them was ever hungry. However, hearing that this person felt hungry right at the start, I was pleased. It's easier to make friends with hungry people. (pp. 2-3)

So, in his stories, instead of recording 'events' in the lives of kings and princes, presidents and ministers, Tagore decides to chronicle the days and nights in the life of an ordinary man; an 'Everyman' one might say: a man caught in what Mikhail Bakhtin would have called, 'ordinary everyday-time':

Every story has a beginning and an end, but my “There lives a man” has no end. His elder sister falls ill; he goes for the doctor. A cat scratches his dog Tommy on the nose. He hops onto the back of a bullock cart and gets into great argument with the carter. He slips and falls at the washing place in the yard and breaks the cook's earthen pitchers. He goes to watch a Mohun Bagan football match and someone swipes three and half annas from his pocket, so he misses buying sweets from Bhim Nag's. At his friend's Kinu Chaudhuri's, he devours fried shrimps and spiced potato curry. Day after day passes this way. (pp. 5-6)

If some reader decides to ask, ‘Who is Tagore's “Everyman”? What is his identity? Is he Tagore's “alter-ego”? Is he Tagore's “Double”? Tagore will not provide a straight-forward answer. He will remain ambiguous:

The “there lives a man” of ours, he certainly has a name. But only two of us know it, and we can't tell anyone else. Here starts the fun of the story. . . This man of ours, we just call him He. When people ask us his name, all we do glance at each other and smile cunningly. . .

Now who is this story about? Our He isn't a prince, but a very ordinary man. He eats, sleeps, goes to the office and is fond of the cinema. His story lies in what everyone does every day . . . The chief prop of the story I've been telling Pupu-didi bears a pronoun for a name and is constituted entirely of words. . . (pp. 6-7)

While discussing the intricate nature of the function of pronouns in Tagore's poetry Ranajit Guha draws an equation between the poet’s 'self' and his other possible
selves represented by pronouns in line of the Lacan's theory of 'the Mirror Stage.'\textsuperscript{57} He further comments:

Language, with the help of a trait ingrained in its very nature, has given man the protected shield of 'pronouns' so that man can defend himself from the dictatorship of 'proper nouns', from 'names'. The chief function of pronouns is to keep the dynamic nature of language alive.\textsuperscript{58}

It will not really be profitable in our present discussion to make conjectures as to how far Tagore's 'He' can be called Tagore's 'Lacanian Other', if we decide to follow Professor Guha's argument which will ultimately take us to the abstruse and dense world of language-philosophy. But, how can Tagore's 'Shey' be associated with any kind of 'subjectivity'; of 'stable' or of other kinds? He does not have any kind of address; permanent or temporary. He lives everywhere and nowhere. When Pupu-didi asks him, ‘Where do you live?’ He replies, ‘In Which town, down Question-Mark alley.’ Even his own body is not something over which he can make a permanent claim. In chapter VII he comes to Dadamoshai and declares, ‘I've lost my body.’

When asked how this can happen, one more of Shey's 'impossible' stories follows. Shey narrates that as he, sitting on the steps of Telenipara Ghat, was scrubbing vigorously at his face with pumice stone he felt drowsy. He then slumped right over and fell headlong into the water. He came up and found that his body was gone. His story had further twists. He went on to describe how he traipsed from village to village, searching high and low for his body. In the end, he found Uncle Patu, sleeping under a banyan tree, high on ganja. He grabbed the opportunity and squeezed his invisible spirit through the nostrils of Patu's inert form. He found a body but that too turned out to be a temporary thing. Interestingly, this episode of the spirit of one entering into the body of another has striking inter-textual connection to another very famous piece in the canon of Bangla fantasy literature. In the first story of Troilokyonath Mukhopadhyay's *Domru Chorit*, published in 1923, Domru's spirit chances upon a tiger-skin in Sundarban, left by a Royal Bengal Tiger a few minutes ago due to a terrible mishap.\textsuperscript{59} Domru enters into it. The tiger comes to life but it is actually Domru taking the form of a tiger.

Apart from being records of soaring flights of imagination, *Shey* and *Domru Chorit* share similarities in another respect. Camouflaged in the garb of fantasy literature both texts are ruthless, savage satires on contemporary social evils. Whereas
in *Domru Chorit* Troilokyonath is most critical of the crass, corrupt profiteering tendencies of the Bangali entrepreneurs, functioning in an equally corrupt colonial regime, Tagore picks up prevalent superstitions; religious and of other kinds, and an education system that lost track of the emotional and intellectual needs of the human subjects. Chapter III of *Shey* is an extremely powerful indictment of the colonial education system. Fantasy literary mode with its capacity to startle readers as it contains the strikingly different or the bizarre gives Tagore opportunity to criticise contemporary reality through the use of the ludicrous. Education, as we know, courtesy Louis Althusser, is one major ISA which usually is extremely significant in interpellating individuals as subjects. Needless to say colonial administration worked overtime to implement such an education system that would function as a state machinery to produce, in a full-proof manner, native subjects whose horizon of expectations would neither include the emancipation of the hidden potential of the learners nor the desire for independence from all kinds of oppression. It saddened Tagore all the more when he saw that the leaders of his own society were also trying to join in the bandwagon of western modernity with its catch-phrases like ‘enlightenment’ or ‘development’.

In *Shey*, the jackal says, ‘I might be an animal, but can’t I aspire to the joys of life? I’m determined you shall make a man of me.’ It thinks, ‘If only I could grow up to be a man, I’d earn quite a name in jackal society. The other jackals would worship me as a god.’ The narrator, (in all likelihood it is *Shey*) says:

> Returning home, I gave my friends the news. They were delighted. “This will be good work indeed,” they approved. “*The world will benefit from it.*’ a few of us got together to form a committee, and we decided to name it *The Society for the Improvement of Jackal Behaviour.* There is a holy porch in our village, fallen to ruin from long years of disuse. We decided to meet there after nine each evening, to engage upon the worthy task of making a man of the jackal. (pp. 17-18) (Italics mine.)

No one can make a man of the jackal no matter how hard one tries. Neither any system of education can turn an Indian into an Englishman. Tagore declares, in no uncertain terms, in *The Centre of Indian Culture*, ‘For the perfect irrigation of learning, a foreign language cannot be a true medium.’ The result of using English instead of the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction would prove to be
disastrous; like the project of turning the jackal into a man. In Shey the end result leaves the entire jackal community stupefied.

Talking about Indian samaj (not ‘society’ in the western sense) – samaj as an organic community – Tagore wanted samaj, not the nation, a political construct, to be the chief building-block of the country of India. In his famous essay 'Swadeshi samaj' he discussed at length how Indian samaj could be turned into a self-sufficient and self-governed unit. He was, however, saddened to see his samaj, instead of becoming a thriving community, turning communal; a samaj burdened with a number of social restrictions and taboos, many of which were utterly meaningless. In chapter VI we come across a tiger which accidentally dipped its mouth into a tub of magenta dye in a turban-seller's house. When the tiger-society found that out and came to the conclusion that ‘he must have gone to some human settlement and drunk unholy vegetarian blood,’ a committee sat down to debate the issue. The unanimous decision was that, ‘He must perform a penance!’ He had no other choice but to do it for if he had refused he would not get any priest to perform the funeral rites after his death. And, as for the penance:

A tiger learned in the rites of roaring and other tigerish customs decreed he would have to remain in the south-west corner of the square where the shrine of the tiger-goddess stands, from the beginning of the dark lunar fortnight to the middle of the moonless night of Amavasya, feeding only on a shoulder of jackal. Furthermore, the kill could be made none other than his paternal uncle's daughter or the second son of his wife's maternal cousin. Even worse, the tiger could only use his right hind-paw to tear off the flesh. When he heard this awful sentence passed, the tiger's inside churned. Clasping his four paws in entreaty, he began to howl piteously. (p.58)

When Pupu comes to know that the tiger, after all, did perform the almost impossible penance she draws the conclusion that, ‘Dadamoshai, tigers must be very orthodox in matters of religion!’ The joke is not lost on the contemporary Hindu society as many knew that the orthodoxy of Bangali samaj could be bought with money. Mention must be made of the infamous 'Kaliprosadi Hungama' that sent shock-waves to the entire Hindu society. Ramdulal Dey Sarkar, a prominent member of the nouveau riche comprador class of Kolkata, challenged the Hindu society when his relative Kaliprasad Dutta was ostracised by the samaj for immoral conducts, with
a now-famous statement, ‘The society is in my chest.’

With this boastful remark, comparable only to the famous comment, ‘I am the State,’ made by Louis XIV, Ramdulal Dey made arrangements to spend millions of rupee in order to buy off the heads of the society. After much hullabaloo, in the end, he, in fact, succeeded in doing so and made the society to revoke the decision of ostracising Kaliprasad.

Religious or not, Tagore had no difficulty in noticing that the contemporary Hindu was a superstitious one. All kinds of hocus-pocus were prevalent in the name of religion. In the play-let, included in chapter III Tagore writes:

Ponchu: Who are you looking for?
Gobra: The Tree-sage.
Ponchu: The Tree-sage? Who on earth is he?
Udho: Why, haven't you heard of him? Everyone in the world knows his name.
Ponchu: Well, let's hear all about it.
Udho: Any tree the Sage seats himself upon is instantly transformed into a wishing-tree. If you stand under it and stretch your hand, you'll get anything you ask for.
Ponchu: Where did you get the news?
Udho: Bheku Sardar of Dhokar village told me. The Tree-sage was perched on a fig tree, swinging his legs. Bheku, who was carrying on his head a large pot of treacle to mix with tobacco, passed under the tree in all innocence. The Tree-sage's dangling leg knocked the pot over, and Bheku found his lips and eyelids sealed with treacle. The Baba is kindness itself; he said, 'Bheku, tell me your heart's desire, and it shall be granted.' Bheku's a fool. He answered, “baba, give me a towel, so that I can wipe this treacle off my face.” No sooner had he spoken than a towel dropped from the branches. When he was done mopping his face, he recovered his wits and looked up at the tree. But the Tree-sage was gone. You can make only one wish. After that, even if you rend the heavens with your wails, he won't respond. (pp. 24-25)

The absurdity of the whole thing does not end here. We are informed that Bheku goes on to do brisk business with the Tree-sage's towel:
Udho: The other day, at the Hondalpara fair, Bheku spread out his towel and got ready for business. Each time he uttered baba's name, there was a positive shower of coins, new potatoes and fresh radishes. The women would come to him and beg, 'Brother Bheku, touch my son's head with your blessed towel, he's been ailing with the fever for three whole months.'

Bheku laid down his rule; five quarter-rupees, five whole betel nuts, five measures of rice and five jars of ghee as offerings in return for his services.

The episode ends with an absolute carnivalesque as Ponchu, Gobra and Udho start searching branches of all the trees around, hoping to see the Tree-sage. They spot Baba sitting on a chalta tree and swinging his tail, in the form of a monkey. Gobra's comment, made at this crucial moment, wonderfully captures the Zeitgeist, 'It's the dark-age, (Ghor kali in original Bangla) you see. The tree-sage has disguised himself as a monkey to trick us.' Sumit Sarkar informs us, in his essay, 'Renaissance and Kaliyuga; Time, Myth and History in Colonial Bengal':

*Kali is the last and the most degenerate of four yugas (eras – the preceding ones being Satya, Treta and Dwapar) in the traditional high-Hindu conception of cyclical time. In Kaliyuga, dharma (right ritual and conduct; from the nineteenth century, often taken to be equivalent of the western notion of 'religion') is at the lowest ebb.*

Professor Sarkar, with wonderful insight, goes on to analyse in his essay how in colonial India a lightning-fast transition from the mythical notion of time to clocks (clocks which showed minutes and seconds) and disciplinary time – a transition which took some five hundred years in western Europe to materialise – resulted in tensions and contradictions in the collective psychology of the Indian people. The result was most pronounced in Bengal where colonial rule made the deepest impact. In complete contrast to the notion that Bangali jati had touched its nadir in Kaliyuga, professor Sarkar documents how the other idea was also doing the round which was about associating Kaliyuga with colonial modernity, an age with a promise of improbable possibilities. This eulogistic attitude towards the modern age put enormous faith in scientific and technological advancements. The Genie of science ('technology', to be more precise), a gift from the 'west', was capable of performing any miracle; some thought.
Tagore had something to say on this. In fact, he devotes an entire chapter (chapter II) in bursting the idea with the help of which science assumed almost mythical proportions:

I'm writing a history of Hoonhau Island. . . A group of scientists have settled on this otherwise uninhabited island. They're performing a very difficult experiment. . . They've uprooted their intestines, their stomachs have caved in. Food is forbidden; they live on snuff. They inhale nutrients with sniffs of air. Some of these reach their insides, the rest are expelled when they sneeze. So both functions are performed at once: the body is purged, and filled up again. . . The entire idea of the digestive system, of abattoirs and butcheries, will be banished. We will be saved the hassle of filling the stomach and paying the bills. The efforts of these scientists will ultimately lead to absolute peace on earth. . . The scientists on the island have extracted a green essence from the grass and dried it in the sun's ultraviolet rays. . . The scientists propose that men must learn from Nature's plan from the babies. On the highest hill on the island, a professor has inscribed these words on stone: "All men must crawl and re-enter existence as quadrupeds, if they wish to prolong their acquaintance with the earth." . . They remind us that speech is man's invention, not Nature's gift. Our incessant babbling daily shortens our breath, and our lives in the long run. . . (pp. 11-13)

Hopefully, with this long passage from the text it has become clear how, by a method of exaggeration (what Shey tells Dadamoshai; in a manner of writing in which one consistently employed 'exaggerated curves and flourishes' as if one 'had Ganesh's trunk for a pen.') Tagore defamiliarises doxa of contemporary society. Tagore's Hoonhau Island is like Swift's land of the Brobdingnags where everything is magnified and blown out of proportions; exposing absurdity of the familiar world in the process. In the public sphere of Calcutta, the newly-emerging urban metropolis – the city of meetings, factories, processions, newspapers, committees, parties, speeches and football-matches – absurdities galore. You merely have to look at the city-life from a slightly different perspective; perhaps in a little bit distorted manner:

. . . that was just the beginning. Since then, I've been elected to no less than twenty-five committees. I've become the certified president of all societies in Bengal: the Society for the Revival of Ancient Indian Music, the Society for
Eradication of the Pond-choking Hyacinth, the Society for the Cremation of the Dead, the Society for the Improvement of Literature, the Society for the Unification of the Three Poets Chandidas, the Society for the Reform of Trade in Sugar-cane fibres, the Society for the Reclamation of Khana's Lost Homestead at Khanyan, the Society for the Improvement of Conditions in Homes for Aged Cattle, the Society for the Protection of Whiskers and Reduction of Barber's Bills – I have become a distinguished member of all these. (p.90)

Now, let us pay attention to the other side of the story; the artistic design with the help of which Tagore wants to escape from a reality that he finds as hostile and debilitating (the reality of the nation-state, of the 'political'). This story is about the creation of a world, with the help of pure imagination; a world in which, to borrow Walter Benjamin's words, ‘... four moons would illuminate the earthly night, the ice would recede from the poles, sea water would no longer taste salty, and beasts of prey would do man's bidding.'64 This is the other dimension of fantasy literature – the possibilities of embarking on a universal quest for deeper realities and eternal truth. In chapter XII Tagore presents his version of the ‘Originary Myth’:

My Guru began his explanation right from ancient times. He said, when man was about to be created, lord Brahma the Four-Faced produced a sweet tone from the lips on his two clean-shaven faces in front. Starting from the soft re and proceeding melodiously up the scale, slipping and sliding on a few twists of the voice, he reached the soft ni. This graceful wave of notes issued from the ruddy dawn clouds in the sky and set the sweet breeze swaying. In its gentle ripples, woman showed herself in the swaying rhythm of dance. Up in heaven, Lord Varuna's wife began blowing on a conch-shell. (p.118)

Whatever you say, you can't deny that the creator is male.

His masculinity could no longer be suppressed. The nostrils of his two bearded faces flared out like a pair of bellows. A storm cloud rushed scolding out of them to the four corners of the sky. That was when discord, with all its terrible force, was first released into the universe – roaring, thumping, grinding. The gandharvas shouldered their tanpuras and fled in hordes to Lord Indra's courtyard, where Sachidevi retires after her bath to dry her hair in the fumes of parijat-scented incense amidst the shade of mandar grove. The
earth-Goddess was sure she had made a horrible mistake: she trembled in fear as she recited the mantra to invoke beneficence. The erratic force of that storm of discord threw out male humans like cannon balls. (p.121)

Thus, we know, according to the narrator in *Shey*, man and woman get created: woman borne out of melody and harmony, man, of cacophony and discord. More of that distinction in the very natures of man and woman will be discussed later. Now, let us just see, how, by incorporating the 'mythical' within the artistic design of a children's fantasy Tagore is able to invoke the 'non-modern'. We know how, while analysing the special nature of India's 'past', Tagore challenged western historiography by adopting, what a modern-day theorist would call a genealogical approach, in his essay 'Bharatborsche Ithihaaser Dhara'; way back in 1912. There, in that essay, Tagore discusses *The Mahabharata* at length and warns the reader that by the age of *The Mahabharata* he does not mean a temporal point in the country's history. For him, it is an 'idea-world' that can exist in any age. This is perhaps what I have termed as the 'non-modern' world. Let me quote from *The Mahabharata* and show how Tagore draws heavily from the mythical world-view of that wonderful ancient text:

When this universe was without brightness and without light and everything was enveloped in darkness on all sides, the great egg came into being. This was the inexhaustible seed of all creatures and was created at the beginning of all the eras. It is said that in this divine cause existed the eternal *brahman*, true and resplendent – wonderful and beyond imagination and perfectly balanced everywhere. This was the subtle un-manifested cause. It was that which exists and that which does not exist. From this was born the one and only Lord Prajapati, known as Brahma, the preceptor of gods. He is also known as Sthanu, manu, Ka and Parameshthin. From him was born Daksha, the son of Prachetas, and Daksha's seven sons, and the twenty-one prajapatis. Him whom all the sages know as the being who cannot be fathomed was also born, as were the vishvadevas, the adityas, the vasus and the ashvins. Yakshas, saddhyas, pishachas, guhykas and the pitris were born and after that were born the learned, holy and superior brahmacharis. Then were born many rajarshis; endowed with every noble quality. The water, heaven, earth, wind, sky and the directions, the years, seasons, months, fortnight, day and night, followed in succession. The world witnessed everything else that came forth. When the
world is immersed in the decay of the era, everything that can be seen, movable and immovable, is again brought together. As the season changes, signs of the season can be seen. Like that, at the beginning of another era, everything is produced again. Without beginning and without end, the wheel of existence rolls on eternally in this world, causing creation and destruction, without beginning and end.66

Tagore, however, in his mythical view of the world, relativises the cosmic timelessness, in a grand scale of *longue durée*, of *The Mahabharata* by juxtaposing the moment of creation with the birth of human civilization. For him, the birth of civilization is also the beginning of discord:

The victory of the hideous over the beautiful, the discordant over the melodious – the Puranas celebrate this principle with laughter and rejoicing, as you will notice if you leaf through the *Annamangal*. There you have it – the tradition of tunelessness, confirmed by scriptures. Why, don't you see how eagerly everyone worships pot-bellied Ganesh? It's a stout protest against the beguiling gracefulness of art. Today, Ganesh's trunk has taken on the shape of a chimney and is trumpeting over the temples of manufacture in the west. Isn't it the loud tuneless of that song that's bringing his devotees success? Think it over. (pp. 123-124)

Thus, Tagore builds up an equation between the profiteering tendency upon which human civilization (in the west?) is built and the disharmony that it creates with the very nature of our world. Interestingly, Tagore gives a further twist to the tale when he associates 'man', the chief motor-force of human civilization, with tunelessness whereas 'woman' represents harmonious musicality for him. It is almost imperative that I must quote from his essay 'Woman' included in his book *Personality* in this connection:

At the present stage of history civilization is almost exclusively masculine, a civilization of power, in which woman has been thrust aside in the shade. Therefore it has lost its balance and is moving by hopping from war to war. Its motive forces are the forces of destruction, and its ceremonials are carried through by an appalling number of human sacrifices. This one-sided civilization is crashing along a series of catastrophes at a tremendous speed because of its one-sidedness.67
However, in Tagore's ideal world – a world neither bound by the borders of the nation-state, nor powered by the imperial greed – 'man' will not aspire a position of power which causes disharmony to the world, for Tagore knows:

Manliness doesn't lie in a tyrannical flaunting of power – quite the contrary.
To this day, it's been man that's created beauty and fought with the discordant.
Evil pretends to be powerful only to the extent that man is cowardly. I find constant proof of this in the world today. (p.130)

This is a most potent indictment against the story of 'virility' and 'counter-virility' propounded by the colonial masters and their colonized subjects. But, Tagore does not lose heart; he is willing to wait for, as Dadamoshai, in *Shyey*, says:

The truth is, my story will need a change of era to come alive. . . The basic materials in the creation of the world were stone, iron and other heavy stuff. . . It was understood that the Almighty was plying his tools to refine the Age of Creation more and more. Man is entangled in both the crude and the fine. The struggle between mind and flesh goes on. . . a few hundreds of thousands of years will go by. Gradually, the flesh will fall away and the mind will emerge supreme. . . The world has three homes – one beneath the ocean, one on land, and one in the sky, with subtle winds and subtler light. This last one is empty at present: it's reserved for the next era. . . in this very universe, fine particles of light are pretending to take on bodily form. . . But at that time, light will find expression in its original, ethereal form. (pp. 140-141)

During the time Tagore was writing the stories of *Shyey* it is certain that he was closely following the direction which modern physics, or, to be precise, quantum physics was taking. He had opportunities to meet with Albert Einstein, not once but four times in a single year, in 1930. Among music and many other things they also talked about the philosophy of science and the nature of 'Truth', scientific and of other kinds. During their third encounter in Berlin, on 19th August Tagore began the conversation with a topic that was current in those days, quantum theory. In this context, we must remember, five years ago, in 1925, Werner Heisenberg revolutionized the world of physics with his 'Principle of Uncertainty'. Heisenberg's one remark is very pertinent here, 'The laws of nature which we formulate mathematically in quantum theory deal no longer with the elementary particles themselves but with our knowledge of the particles.' Tagore writes in *Shyey*:
In the language of the Age of truth, they have plenty of meaning. The other day, your teacher Pramatha-babu told you that the molecules that make up light are a shower of tiny particles, like rain; and at the same time, a current of flowing waves, like a river. Our ordinary intelligence tells us, “either this, or that”, but the scientific mind accepts both at the same time. In the same way, at the same time, you're both Pupu and the cat – so says the Age of Truth. (p.146)

The 'Principle of Indeterminacy' of modern physics and the quest for alternative realities of fantasy literature, thus, meet. And, therefore, when Tagore says to Einstein that truth is realized through man we marvel at the striking similarity between an artist's view and that of a scientist. Tagore further clarifies his point to Einstein:

There can be no other Truth except a conception, purely human conception of the universe. This world is a human world – the scientific view of it is also that of the scientific man. Therefore, the world apart from us does not exist; it is a relative world, depending for its reality upon our consciousness. There is some standard reason and enjoyment which gives truth, the standard of the Eternal Man whose experiences are through our experiences. 70

On 29\textsuperscript{th} May 1936, Tagore wrote a poem, 'Ami' (‘I’) which is included in the book Shyamoli. The extremely famous opening lines of the poem tell us about how the poet, through his consciousness has made the ruby red and emerald green. When the poet looks at the sky it becomes illuminated, in the east and in the west. A 'post-historicist', post-nation world can, thus, be built in the realm of consciousness; a realm whose reality is realised through art. The 'epiphanic mode' observable in the poem I mentioned; a mode which joins Rabindranath with the Romantics, is also to be noticed in the piece of fantasy literature with which we are presently concerned. 71

Tagore writes, in the last chapter of Shyey:

Imagine – the southernly wind begins to blow – the branches of the tree are covered with flowers, an invisible charm flows through its veins, with a constant play of beauty and sweet scent. How dearly we wish to feel the passion from within! If you can't be a tree, how can you feel the boundless thrill of a tree in springtime? (p.146)

I had wanted to be a bit of the landscape, stretched over a wide expanse. It's the hour of dawn, and now that the month of magh is drawing to a close the wind is restless. In the tossing wind, the old ashvatthva tree seems as lively as
a child; the waters of the stream have broken into a soft babble and the trees stand in shadowy groups on its rolling banks. Behind all this stretches the open sky, and it has a faraway look – as if a bell is ringing on the far bank of that empty distance, the notes half-blown away by the wind, its message mingling with the sunshine: the hour passes. (p.149)

The above-quoted passages, in a mood comparable to that of the Kantian Sublime and the expression, ‘the hour passes’ take the reader to a world; a world, which Dadamoshai calls, in the ‘Age of Truth’, whose temporality is outside the official calendrical time of the nation. It is the temporality of art in which the artist re-makes our known-world, our familiar reality for us; through Wordsworthian ‘spots of time’. Bikash Chakravarty, in his essay, 'Romantic Epiphany o Rabindranath', quotes William Blake, in this context, ‘To see a World in a Grain of Sand/ and a Heaven in a Wild Flower/ Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand.'

When Sukumar asks Dadamoshai, ‘Do you think there ever will be an Age of Truth?’ Dadamoshai answers, ‘Till it arrives, we have paintings and poems. They are wonderful paths down which you can forget yourself and become other things.’ Sankha Ghosh writes in the 'Introduction' to Shey how Tagore was attacked for ignoring contemporary reality by the young writers of the new 'modern' age as they alleged that he continued to create a world of illusions. He quotes from a letter that Tagore wrote to Amiya Chakrabarty on 24 February 1939, ‘When these policemen guarding realist literature chase after me, I seek refuge in my songs . . . and in my paintings.’

This brings us to the other extremely significant element in the artistic design of this text; the pen-and-ink line drawings, done in black-and-white. We should not forget that 1925-30 was not only period in which Tagore was delivering his Hibbert Lectures in Oxford or meeting with western intellectual-giants like Sigmund Freud (25 July 1926) or Albert Einstein. He was also painting with gay abandon and the first-ever exhibition of his paintings in the west was taking place in July 1930 at Gallerie Pigalle, Paris. Sushobhon Adhikary, an art-historian who specialises in Tagore's paintings, informs us that during the last decade of his life, in spite of being plagued by ill health, Tagore made some two thousand paintings. That is quite a staggering number considering the fact that Tagore could only manage to compose not more than two thousand songs; an act in which he was engaged all his life. Thus, it
can be said with conviction that in the last phase of his life as an artist Tagore was completely under the sway of the world of painting. In a letter written to Nirmalkumari Mahalanobish in 29 November 1928 Tagore writes:

Before now, I listened to what the sky had to say; my mind was alert to the music that came floating by through air, it could hear voices. Nowadays, my eyes are wide open and are looking at the world of forms and a crowd of lines. I look at the trees and can sense that this world is a grand procession of shapes and forms. I too want to recreate this great leela of forms in my paintings. It is not ideas, neither emotions nor thoughts; it is a congregation of figures and forms. The strange part is that in this act of creation of pure forms there is immense delight. It is intoxicating. These days, lines have taken full control of me – I cannot escape from the charms of this new passion.

In the world of drawings that the text of Shey has to offer there is an absolute feast of forms. There are sketches of characters like Smritiratnamashai and Ramsaday, the prosecutor, from the world around us, to Gandishandung, Bell-Ear or a figure with no name (it is simply called 'With spikes and a tongue hanging out'), figures from the world of fantasy-imagination. The drawings are not merely a celebration of forms, a whim of the author; these are pure forms (drawn out from the land of the 'id'? ) created in a world of pure imagination, to be enjoyed for their own sake. We should not forget that, in an important way, Shey is a text meant to be a children's book too. Tagore, as an artist as well as an educationist, (he was busy writing the chapters of Biswa-parichoy, a science-primer for young learners, almost around the same time when he was composing the last few chapters of Shey) was well aware of the kind of impact these drawings would have upon young minds. Tagore was not aiming at naturalistic, photographic-reality of pictures, usually done in colour for children's books. He knew his drawings, done in black-and-white, would trigger off their power of imagination; would encourage their imagination to take wings, in order to explore newer horizons of reality. (One must not forget, in this respect, the two-dimensional wood-cuts and lino-cuts, done in black-and-white, by Nandalal Bose, which were used in Sahajpaath, the Bangla primer that Tagore wrote. Their importance in that book can hardly be over-estimated.) Speaking on the significance of black-and-white woodcuts or drawings in children's primers Walter Benjamin says:
Such pictures, with the urgent demand for description that lies within them, rouse the word within the child. Just as the child describes [beschreibt] the pictures with words, so, too, does he "inscribe" [beschreibt] them in a more literal sense. He scribbles on them . . . the surface of the black-and-white illustration is arranged only suggestively and has a capacity for a certain condensation [Verdichtung]. So the child composes into the picture.76

Just like the picture of a tiger which William Blake drew to print alongside his poem 'The Tyger' in the book Songs of Experience similarly Tagore too wanted his drawings to accompany his fantastic tales; one way of encouraging his young readers to explore total reality. (Interestingly Tagore too has his own tiger-poem and the drawing of a meek-looking tiger in Shey.) Like Sukumar, the character of a 'dreamer' that he creates in Shey; a character who gradually replaces Shey towards the end of the series, he wants his young readers to ride their winged-horses of imagination ‘along the paths of nothingness.’ Sukumar is a painter too. In the end of the story, when his father objects to his hobby of painting and urges him to learn something 'worthwhile' Sukumar leaves for Europe with the dream of becoming an astronaut. In a letter, he writes:

This time, it's not impossible that my horse's wings should break halfway on the road to the moon. If they do, I'll reach the Land of truth in the blink of an eyelid – my journey round the sun will end in my melting into the earth. If I survive and become adept at paddling my boat across the sky, I hope one day to take Pupu-didi with me on a journey into space. I seem to remember that in the Age of Truth, what you wanted was exactly what happened. I'll try to train my mind to see desire as result. (p.154)

Sukumar, thus, promises to make a return and possibly take us, along with Pupu-didi, to the Age of Truth. In the very last sentence of 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', Walter Benjamin writes, ‘For every second of time was the straight gate through which the Messiah might enter.’77 Sukumar, we are waiting.
Notes


2 See Homi. K. Bhabha, ‘DissemiNation’ in Homi. K. Bhabha (ed.) *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge, 1990 (rpt.), 1995, p.293. Bhabha’s list includes ‘Amor Patria; Fatherland; Pig Earth; Mothertongue; Matigari; Middlemarch; Midnight’s Children; One Hundred Years of Solitude; War and Peace; I Promessi Sposi; Kanthapura; Moby Dick; The Magic Mountain; Things Fall Apart; ’

3 Ibid.


6 Ibid, p.84. Holquist writes, “Chronotope is one of the very few non-Russian words Bakhtin used as a part of his technical vocabulary, *Khronotop*, being recognisably Greek in Russian, as it is in English... he was anxious to define this one with relative precision: he specifies when he first heard it (‘summer of 1925’), and from whom (the distinguished Leningrad physiologist Ukhtomsky).” See Michael Holquist, *Dialogism; Bakhtin and His World*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990, (rpt.), 1997, p.109.

7 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.250.


11 Ibid.

12 *Salon*, is official exhibition of art sponsored by the French government. It originated in 1667 when Louis XIV sponsored an exhibit of the works of the members of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, and the salon derives its name from the fact that the exhibition was hung in the Salon d’Apollon of the Louvre Palace in Paris. After 1737 the Salon became an annual rather than a sporadic event, and in 1748 the jury system of selection was introduced. During the French Revolution the Salon was opened for the first time to all French artists, although the academicians continued to control most of the exhibitions held in the 19th century. With the formation in 1881 of the Société des Artistes Français to take over the responsibility of holding the Salon, and with the growing importance of independent exhibitions of the works of avant-garde artists, the Salon gradually lost its influence and prestige. – *Encyclopædia Britannica CD-99, Multimedia Ed.*


16 In the words of Sumit Sarkar:
The striking fact, therefore, was that the nineteenth-century Bengali Bhadralok seldom wrote about Calcutta and tended to emphasize the negative features of its life when they did: . . . Despite the novelty of the metropolitan experience, cityscapes entered rarely into imaginative literature, unlike, say, in Dickens or Baudelaire, . . . Calcutta, rather, was often portrayed as the heart of Kaliyuga, the last and most degenerate of eras in the traditional upper-caste Hindu notion of cyclical time, in which aliens rule and hierarchies of caste, gender and age are inverted.

Ibid, p.177


21 Ibid, p.16.

22 Ibid, p.31.


28 Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘Nation and Imagination’, p.204.


31 Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel’, p.256.
32 See Peter Childs (ed.) Post-Colonial Theory and English Literature: A Reader, p.239. Peter Childs makes a very significant observation regarding the choice of ‘hybridity’ for heroes by both Kipling and Tagore and points out the parallel between the two texts in this respect. About Kim’s Irish ancestry he writes that it is a kind of ‘national identity which places him simultaneously as both colonizer and colonized’. He adds, “the gesture is repeated by Rabindranath Tagore in his novel Gora: ‘No, I am not a Hindu,’ continued Gora, ‘Today I have been told that I was a foundling at the time of the Mutiny. My father was an Irishman.’”


35 Meenakshi Mukherjee, Upoys'ey otit: itihaas o kolpoitihaas, Kolkata: Thema, 2003, p-40


38 Sigmund Freud, ‘The Uncanny’ (Das Unheimliech) 1919. This translation was originally made available for Mark Taylor's course on the Psychology of Religion at Williams College, Massachusetts, USA.


41 See Dipesh Chakrabarty, Itihaas'er jonajibon on onanyo probondho, Kolkata: Ananda, 2011, p.111.

42 See Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel’, p.246.


Jürgen Habermas uses the term 'post-historicist' to describe Walter Benjamin's attitude towards statist history. See Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity – an Incomplete Project', *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981) p.6.


See Rabindranath Tagore, *He (Shey)*, Aparna Chaudhuri (trans.), p.143. All subsequent citations are from this text unless otherwise stated.


See Sankha Ghosh, *Kalponar hysteria*, Kolkata: Papyrus, 1999, p.108. Professor Ghosh sees the 'imaginative' works of Abanindranath Tagore as works in which the 'sociology' of words are thrown overboard and the world of fantasy that he creates does not include any reference point from the world of immediate reality. Unlike Tagore's *Shey* Abanindranath's imaginative world bears hardly any traces of the world in which we live.


Ibid, p.23.


For a detailed account of the episode see Subir Raychaudhuri, *Shey juger kecccha e kaaler ithaas*, Kolkata: Bhashabondhon, 2012, pp.23-35


For a detailed account of those meetings and the exchanges between the two great minds regarding the philosophy of science see Dipankar Chattopadhyay, *Rabindranath o bigyan*, Kolkata: Ananda, 2000, pp.212-267.

70See Rabindranath o bignyan, p.258.

71I borrow the term 'epiphanic mode' from Professor Bikash Chakravarty, my teacher. For a detailed discussion of the term and its connotations see Bikash Chakravarty, 'Romantic Epiphany o Rabindranath' in Ingrejitey Rabindranath o onyanyo probondho, Kolkata: Punascha, 2010, pp.65-90.

72Ibid, pp.69-70.

73See Sankha Ghosh, 'Introduction', Rabindranath Tagore, Shey, p. XIV.

74See Sushobhon Adhikary, Paintings of Rabindranath: Unknown Works Unheard Tales, Kolkata: Karigar, 2011


77Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', p.264.