Marlene NourbeSe Philip, who was born Afro-Caribbean, is a Canadian poet, writer and a lawyer, whose second novel, *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence*¹, published in 1991, confronts the conventional archive and questions the nature of historiography which has led to the silencing of her past, her world and her people. The book defies the limitations of generic boundaries, so that critics have found it difficult to classify her works. *Looking for Livingstone* has been variously classified as a book of essays containing poems, as a book of poems, as a novel and even as an epic. In this novel, NourbeSe Philip explores the silent voices of the tribal people of Africa in a manner which is in stark contrast to that of the Scottish explorer, David Livingstone. The novel talks about Dr. David Livingstone’s (a Scottish explorer who lived from 1813-1873) re-naming of the Falls of Mosioatunya to “Victoria Falls” and his claimed ‘discovery’ of the African land. NourbeSe writes that Livingstone “was one of the first Europeans to cross the Kalahari”². Although Livingstone was shown the falls beside the River Zambezi by the natives, he claims to have “discovered” the falls. Even today, the area of “Victoria Falls” is also a tourist spot called “Livingstone.” This act of naming had instituted violence to the indigenous knowledge systems and had reclaimed for itself not only the power involved in this naming, but also the place as well as the history associated with it. The violence that is involved in the act of naming as well as in the act

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² Ibid. 7.
of mapping is also explored in the works of Amitav Ghosh. Europe had sought to know the colonised world in the way it wanted to, not the way it existed, thus silencing the knowing of it. The quest in this novel by NourbeSe Philip is to travel to different places, listen to the people, their stories and make an honest attempt at understanding their perceived silence. In this novel, we have a woman travelling alone through time to Africa and unnamed lands; she is searching for Dr. David Livingstone, who is celebrated by the West as a “discoverer” of Africa. Throughout her quest, for knowledge and for Livingstone, the traveller visits many peoples, listening to their stories and their silences. The traveller travels to several places in order to explore the knowledge about the past. The places where she travels are named with anagrams of silence— CESLIENS, NEECLIS, LENSECI, SCENILE etc. Silence thus becomes a subject; it becomes nature, becomes people, becomes place and becomes language. NourbeSe here subverts, deconstructs and reconstructs the idea of silence: the idea itself becomes the metaphor for the polyphony of voices. Silence is here not equated with absence or lack of speech; rather it becomes a language in itself. *Looking for Livingstone* subverts the Western assumptions about the “silence” of indigenous peoples.

In Ghosh’s works as well as in NourbeSe’s novel, we find this ever-present anxiety about maps, about language, about silences and about history, where European epistemologies have hegemonised all other forms of alterity. Both the authors try in their own ways to recuperate that alterity and to suggest as well as acknowledge the presence of other forms of knowledge. My exploration of Amitav Ghosh’s novels in my research has been to seek out those various types of silences— CESLIENS, NEECLIS, LENSECI, SCENILE, and, in that process, to discover for myself my silent past. The exploration of
silence is, as in NourbeSe’s work, not perceived as a lack in terms of binaries; but it is considered as something that can be present and absent, destructive and creative—all at the same time. In my exploration of silences in Amitav Ghosh’s works, I have not limited myself to any particular theoretical approach. The silences that I have explored in his novels have both positive and negative connotations. I had started my investigation by trying to find out how Ghosh addresses the generic silences with regard to disciplines like history and ethnography, and how the rigid methodologies, which often have the pretension of being objective, ultimately acquires a hegemonic voice and seeks to silence any other alternative forms of knowledge. This is quite relevant keeping in mind the multi-disciplinary background of Ghosh’s own academic pursuits. In this regard, I have tried to figure out how he explores the silences of such genres by preferring the fictional mode of writing. I have already pointed out in one of the chapters, how Ghosh does history. He addresses the silences of history by inscribing in his fiction the narratives of the family and placing them parallel to the narratives of the nation. He uses “imagination with precision”\(^3\) in the way the historical setting is rendered through meticulous research; with his characters we seem to relive the past. I have also explored the notion of silence with regard to the representation of violence. In this continuously violent world, where almost everyday acts of violence like terrorism, riots, civil war, ethnic cleansing, racial discrimination are taking place, it becomes extremely relevant to find out the ethical imperative of a writer in regard to his social responsibility. In that respect, I have explored the relationship between language and silence in regard to the characters and the art of characterisation. Non-verbal communication becomes an important aspect of Ghosh’s characterization and these silent characters, in a sense embody, an entire

metaphysics. Non-verbal communication as well as deep communication between the characters also suggests that there are other forms of knowledge, which cannot be perceived by applying only the rigid methodologies of European knowledge system. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*[^4], Ghosh particularly explores the possibility of alternative knowledge systems, where silence and secrecy constitutes an entire way of knowing the world. It would thus be appropriate to conclude the dissertation by highlighting the aforementioned aspects of my research.

**The Novel as a Genre**

It is difficult to categorise NourbeSe’s *Looking for Livingstone* into any specific genre; however, I have conveniently categorised it as a novel, probably because of the fact that the fictional form offers a greater flexibility than any other literary genre. It has been interesting to survey Ghosh’s preference for the fictional form over other historical and anthropological narratives. Ghosh’s novels are, in a sense, remarkable, because of the several experiments that he conducts with the fictional form. He reflects upon his preference for the fictional form in several of his essays as well as in his interviews. In an interview with Michelle Caswell, he suggests the reason for his preference for the novel over other genres:

> For me, the value of the novel, as a form, is that it is able to incorporate elements of every aspect of life— history, natural history, rhetoric, politics, beliefs, religion, family, love, sexuality. As I see it the novel is a meta-form that transcends the boundaries that circumscribe other kinds of writing, rendering meaningless the usual workaday

distinctions between historian, journalist, anthropologist etc.\(^5\)

His is a conscious engagement with the possibilities which fiction can provide to him as an author in relation to his past as well as in relation to his sense of place. The novel is characterised by its sense of place and the notion of parochiality, which he discusses in his essay, “The March of the novel through History: The Testimony of my Grandfather’s Bookcase”\(^6\). Besides his experiments with the form of the narrative, his concern for certain issues, like the sense of place, the art of story-telling, the freedom that fiction offers and the possibility of representing multi-lingual reality are predominant throughout his fictional works. In an interview in *UN Chronicle*, Ghosh states that:

\[\text{In a sense, the experiments that a novelist requires to perform, when he is not writing in his mother tongue, involves an act of translation and the desire to represent inter-cultural communications of a multi-lingual world. This is especially relevant in the case of Indian writers writing in English. The novel form, which had actually had its birth in monolingual tradition, needs to be attuned to a tradition where inter-cultural communications and multi-lingual reality can be expressed in terms of a single language. In that sense,}\]

writing in English becomes, for novelist like Ghosh, an engaging interaction with language. The situation of Europe has also changed significantly with the forces of globalisation and the increase in migration, which has made the act of writing fiction something that is always/already implicated in the act of translation. Ghosh, in that interview, suggests:

> It is also true that writers like me have been pioneers. Everybody is going to have to deal with multilinguality and interlingual communication. The old monolingual worlds are in some way not the same as they used to be; that is why translation is such an important part of this book [The Hungry Tide]. I feel that this is the crucial sense in which writers are figures in the emergent culture we see ahead.8

The act of writing for Amitav Ghosh is implicated in the process of translation and thus his concern for language and experiments with language becomes an important narrative strategy in his works.

**Language and Silence**

Language and silence both come alive in Ghosh’s works. It is, for example, extremely difficult to reproduce non-verbal communication in terms of its opposite, that is, language, and that is what Ghosh achieves in his works. The non-verbal communication, as a form of communication that is explored in the world of the images, as in cinema, is difficult to achieve in terms of words; non-verbal communication in acts of oral communication is difficult to report in a fictional narrative. Ghosh’s language achieves not only the intimacy of communication, but also the possibility of interaction and the “clamour of the voices”9, as we find in, say, a Bengali *adda*. His works also

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8 Ibid.
achieve the intimacy of tone, which is so characteristic of Bengali novels. This shifting of
registers from Bengali to English gives his novel a distinct flavour and, while doing so,
he does not necessarily submit to a “chutnification”\(^{10}\) of the English language. In an
interview, Ghosh states:

> What is really interesting is that the voice Bengali fiction
adopts is a very intimate form of address. It’s a really
wonderful thing that you find in say, the work of
Thackeray; a very intimate form of address in which you
draw your reader in. The texture of that prose has a kind of
warmth which is very different from what you get in
English. Whenever I get stuck with anything I find myself
listening for that voice, saying to myself, ‘If I were saying
this in Bengali, how would I say it?’ On one level you can
say that it’s almost a transposition of the spoken voice in
fiction.\(^{11}\)

Two things are evident here: one that he is affecting an immediate translation from
Bengali to English and, secondly, this narrative style tries to approximate the proximity
of oral narratives. The Bon Bibi story is the perfect example of this form of translation.
This dialogic interaction of multiple voices is especially important in a narrative where
the story is located in a multi-lingual world.

The ability to undermine one hegemonic voice taking over all the other voices is
something that Ghosh achieves in his writing and this is in keeping with the spirit of
conversation. Ghosh, in a discussion with Claire Chambers, stresses on the importance of
conversation. In this discussion, he suggests how he had borrowed a copy of Boswell’s
*Life of Johnson*\(^{12}\) from a library in Cairo and how this book had an enormous impact on
him. He realised how Johnson never did anything, but talk and engage in conversation. It

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was then that he realised the importance of conversation in any type of narrative.\textsuperscript{13} His narrative, in both his fictional and non-fictional works, tries to achieve this quality of conversation. It is this conversational nature of the narrative that he meticulously follows in \textit{In an Antique Land}\textsuperscript{14}, which enables him to recuperate the silent voices without succumbing to the type of hegemony that is embedded in an anthropological narrative. It was for him an amazing experience to discover that the rural Arabic, which he had learnt in the villages of Egypt, suddenly came alive, as he was trying to make sense of the Taylor-Schechter collection. It is this quality of coming alive, as if people are talking with each other, that informs his narrative technique:

\begin{quote}
So you can read these texts today and get a sense of talking to someone you’ve actually met. And I think it was that that gave this sense to the book, it really was a villager speaking, coming alive as it were.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

Ghosh’s narrative style thus tries to achieve the intimacy and immediacy of a conversation. Considered both from the thematic and formative aspects of story-telling, weaving is a perfect metaphor for the type narrative technique that Ghosh makes use of in his works. The metaphor of weaving is developed in great detail in \textit{The Circle of Reason}\textsuperscript{16} and, in fact, forms an important metaphor in the novel. The craft of weaving symbolises the inter-weaving of narrative structures, genres, cultures and even the notion of space and time in Ghosh’s novels. Alu has to learn three languages in order to master the loom. The loom is not characterised by the boundaries of languages; rather it assimilates different terminologies in different countries, different times and different cultures. This

\textsuperscript{14} Amitav Ghosh, \textit{In an Antique Land} (New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 2000).
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. 29.
\textsuperscript{16} Amitav Ghosh, \textit{The Circle of Reason} (New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, Permanent Black, 2002).
syncretic nature of the craft of weaving and the nature of inter-weaving embedded in the art form is what Ghosh’s language seeks to achieve. It is this inter-weaving that allows Ghosh to experiment with representing multiple realities of a multi-lingual world in terms of the English language. His experiments with language also lead to him to explore the possibility of staging non-communication in terms of language. It is trying to achieve the quality of a picture in terms of words.

Language is also thematically important in another way: violence is embedded in language. Ideology is constructed and created by using the subtle nuances of language, so that it is often difficult to understand or perceive it. In his works, Ghosh is thus particularly concerned with etymology of words as well as the act of naming. He is also concerned with the difficulty in translating words across cultures. The violence embedded in language is found in several types of relationships that Ghosh explores, such as the coloniser-colonised relationship (Sea of Poppies\textsuperscript{17}), differences between religions (The Shadow Lines, In an Antique Land) and between caste and class (The Hungry Tide\textsuperscript{18}, Sea of Poppies). I have argued in the chapter ‘Silence and Violence’, how the violence of language is deeply ingrained within cultures, so that the differences it creates are actually the dormant cause behind the acts of violence. It is also through language that one can reach an understanding of violence. Amitav Ghosh seeks to strive against the silence that creeps into us as a response to the banality of violence. The difference between him and certain other writers, like Rushdie, who are writing about South Asia, is the responsibility that one must exercise in representing South Asia. In such incendiary circumstances, words have the power to create, perpetuate and even attest violence. As a writer, Ghosh

\textsuperscript{17} Amitav Ghosh, \textit{Sea of Poppies} (New Delhi: Viking, Penguin, 2008).
feels that even in situations of violence, there are always incidences that are, in a way, heroic and redemptive in the way they seek to combat violence. It is these stories that one must talk about and recuperate from the silences of the grand narratives, for these are the stories that would give us the courage to face, fight and confront violence. Story-telling is an important metaphor in Ghosh’s works, for not only does he engage in story-telling, but he theorises about the necessity of story-telling as well:

If there is anything distinctive about human beings, as a species, it consists, I believe, in our capacity to experience the world through stories.19

Ghosh’s upbringing in a multi-religious and multi-lingual country had made him aware of the nuances of language, the power of its symbols and even of its translatability across cultures. His knowledge of five languages as well as his travels to and upbringing in different parts of the world have made him aware of the resonances and inter-linking that a word might have across cultures. The resonances are even reflected in the naming of the characters in his novels. Sea of Poppies and In an Antique Land respectively offer two important aspects of language that Ghosh explores. In In an Antique Land, Ghosh is concerned with the symbols and metaphors of language that cannot be translated across cultures and these are the symbols that create discord from differences. Our knowledge systems, our world-views are culturally regulated, and are restricted within the possibilities of our language. The narrator in In an Antique Land finds it difficult to justify issues like burning of the dead and circumcision in terms of the Arabic language. He also explores how a word can have different connotations in different cultures. He explores how ‘slavery’ might have had a completely different meaning in the eastern half

of the world. *Sea of Poppies*, on the other hand, explores the fluidity of language in the nineteenth century, as compared to the modern period. Life at sea and kinship at sea had, in a sense, radicalised and re-organised human relationships as well as human languages. The nautical language assimilates within its fold a plethora of tongues which is representative of the richness of life at sea. The novel explores the flexibility and the richness of the language of the Indian Ocean. Ghosh has acknowledged the influence of Herman Melville in this respect. Ghosh had said in an interview that another amazing aspect of this language is that most of the words used in this novel can be found in *The Oxford Dictionary*.²⁰

**Family and the Nation**

Throughout the thesis I have argued that Ghosh is doing history in his novels. He has introduced a different aspect of story-telling informed by his background in the social sciences which, in a sense, had led to the dissolution of fixed generic boundaries in his works. His novels seek to recuperate the stories of the family which have been predominantly silenced by the narratives of the nation. Indian English literature has grappled with the notion of the nation from its very beginning. Nation was perceived in the early Indian English writings as a progress that European modernity, especially the enlightenment, had provided us with. The novels of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and others had grappled with the Gandhian and the Nehruvian model of social development. The nation was both perceived in terms of a glorious past and in terms of a predominant Hindu mythology. After the publication of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and after the

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terrorism and riots that disturbed the nation, the so-called complacency in regard to the
development of the nation was suddenly disrupted and the Indian English novel
increasingly sought to grapple with the trauma of Partition, the rupture it created as well
as the dreams of a failed nationhood. After the publication of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s
Children* and the terrorism and riots that disturbed the nation, the so-called complacency
in regard to the development of the nation was suddenly disrupted and the Indian English
novel increasingly sought to grapple with the trauma of Partition, the rupture it created as
well as the dreams of a failed nationhood. The nation was then analysed in terms of the
split it created, in terms of the family and in terms of the community. The family thus
becomes an important centre and reference point, an important point of view from which
to look at the nation. In our discussion with Ghosh, he pointed out that, unlike the nation
in the European context, it is the concept of the family that provides the sense of
continuity:

So I am by no means saying that the nation is not an
important thing; but see, if you are writing about the
nineteenth century, as I have seen, if you are writing about
the long durée of time, we can’t write in the same way that
a Frenchman can write or the same way that a Swede can
write whose nation has persisted for two hundred, three
hundred or even five hundred years. For us, how then do
we write about the continuity? That institutional
continuation is not there for us. For us, writing about the
nineteenth century is to try and create this continuity, which
means falling back inevitably on the institution of the
family.21

The family provides the continuity in time and space from which to experience the idea
of nation. In *The Glass Palace*22, for example, it is through the family that the places

21 Appendix 1.
come alive and acquire meanings. In this world of globalisation, capitalism, diaspora and migration, place is experienced more in terms of the family than in terms of the nation.

In an interview, Ghosh had said that history forms the third dimension in the novel; and, if one is not able to see this dimension, the novel would be reduced to a sort of flatness.\textsuperscript{23} He is interested in history because it provides a setting to his novel. He also interested in history in the way it provides with unique human predicament. In an interview by Frederick Louis Aldama, Ghosh had said that he is not attempting to do something radical and had pointed out that Proust had written about the family rather than about the nation:

\begin{quote}
I think this way of writing about the contemporary world goes back to Proust, you know? With Proust, again, it’s essentially the family that pulls in the threads of nationhood and politics and individuality. That’s very much an available tradition within modernism. I mean, the family certainly is absolutely critical to my narration.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

He is also not writing about the nation, because in South Asia the idea of nation does not provide the same sense of continuity and the same relation with social progress, as it does in the European context. The narrative of the nation is also, in a sense, ruptured by the Partition of the sub-continent. The notion of family, in fact, transcends the boundaries of nation as well as the limitations of a nation:

\begin{quote}
To me, the family is the central unit, because it’s not about the nation, you know? Families can actually span nations. \textit{The Glass Palace} actually ranges between what are now many different nations, so it’s absolutely not about a nation or one nation or whatever. The fact that it has been structured around the family is absolutely essential to its
\end{quote}

narration. It is explicitly not about a nation, as it were. And I think it is not just me. I think the reason why you see so many Indian books essentially centered on the family is precisely because the nation is not, as it were, the central imaginative unit.25

The family, to him, provides continuity in time and place that the concept of the nation, especially in South Asia, does not. Imperialism has disrupted the

… overarching structure of society. It removes your king, it removes your belief in the wider organisms, so the wider cause of society completely disintegrates. So what are you left with? You are left with a very distant imperial power with which you really have no connection, and you are left with a sort of atavistic individualism. So there is the Scylla and Charybdis. So what was the unit that people clung to? It was the family. The family was what made your life possible.26

Besides imperialism, it was the Partition of the sub-continent into three independent nations which has disrupted the sense of security and continuity that the notion of nation could have fostered. Ghosh points out that the notion of the nation in the nineteenth century has also undergone erosion from two levels. The notion has eroded from the top in that the rich nations have begun to melt into each other and this is evident in the idea of the European Union and the G8. It has also melted from the bottom in that the boundaries in countries like Burma, Thailand etc. have become porous.27 It is thus the notion of the family which provides that stable continuity that fiction seeks for. The narratives of the nation have also for long dominated the novel, so that life lived at the peripheries have always been represented in terms of state ideologies and grand narratives. Ghosh thus seeks to recuperate the stories of the family which are more sustaining in nature and affect human predicaments more than anything else. In most of

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25 Ibid.
26 Vijay Kumar, 102.
27 Ibid. 102.
the novels, his characters are in perpetual travel, so that family and kinship are the only constant in which they try to seek their comfort and solace. It is also an indictment of the nation in failing to provide the security and comfort that one looks for.

**Imagination with Precision**

The novel form offers great flexibility to Amitav Ghosh to experiment with generic boundaries, thematic limitations as well as narrative strategies. He re-instates the family into the narratives of the nation. Family and kinship give us a sense of place that can be imaginatively constructed in our mind. Like Tridib in *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh uses imagination with precision. He undergoes meticulous historical and social research so as to draw up a setting for his novels. The precision with which he locates the characters within those historical settings is what creates the semblance of plausibility. The past comes alive with its entire ramification that it holds for the predicament of the individual. It is the imagination with which we construct our memories of our childhood, and it is these memories, rather than artificially constructed national boundaries, which give each place its meaning and importance. Most of the characters get bewildered when confronted with this lack of place. Lack of rootedness is a modern predicament and yet it is this lack of rootedness that binds us to our memories and induces nostalgia for that lived sense of place that had once provided us with security and fixity. The sense of place has become an important theme in most of the post-Partition literature of the sub-continent, because it is precisely that which we have lost. The violence of the Partition has been difficult to understand or grapple with, precisely because of this disruption and division in our memory which has been created out of this lost sense of place.
violence has been bitter, because it is this sense of place that brothers from different religions have shared in common. The metaphor of the division of Thamma’s ancestral house is the family-equivalent of what was happening to the nation. The continuous coming and going in Zindi’s house and the ultimate dispersion of the group in search of yet unknown lands is also representative of the modern condition. The destruction of Balaram’s house and the consequent death of Balaram points to the cruel workings of the mechanism of the state and the ridiculous nature of policing. This nature of policing is also being reflected in the way they attack Alu and his group who were going for marketing. It is, in a sense, an indictment of the power of the state. This idea of the loss of home is explored also in *The Hungry Tide*, especially in the Morichjhâpi incident. The forces of the government had brutally tried to evict the refugee settlers and, in the process, had also killed quite a lot of them. The refugees had escaped from the barren land of Dandakaranya to settle in the familiar territory of the Sundarbans. It was the river-life with which they were more familiar. In the name of conservation of forests and tiger project, the refugees were brutally evicted from their place. With the Morichjhâpi massacre the subalterns dreams of an organised society in the Sundarbans had come to an end. It is this sense of place, of kinship, of community which have been severely disrupted—first by the Partition and then by the powers of the state. *Sea of Poppies* provides an altogether novel sense of kinship. In varied circumstances people have to leave the security of their family and place to travel to unknown lands. These are the people who have, in a sense, been victimised or ostracised by their family or by the society at large. The sea offers them a unique proposition of being able to live their life in completely renewed circumstances. They form of a kinship which is totally different
from the logic of the family or that of the society. They all become ‘Jahajbhais’ and ‘Jahajbehens’ and create for themselves new roles and rules to live with. The notion of a lived sense of place becomes an important metaphor in all the novels by Ghosh and this is best experienced through the family or community rather than through the nation. The author thus brings out from the silences of history the predicament of the individual striving to re-configure his sense of place in terms of the family and the nation. Ghosh uses imagination with precision in the delineation of the individual predicament.

Non-verbal Communication and Empirical Silences

Non-verbal communication, as I have discussed in one of the chapters, namely ‘Silence and the Other Arts’, forms a significant aspect in Ghosh’s characterisation, especially in the delineation of subaltern characters. Silence in his novels is for the most part used in the empirical sense. Ghosh in the interview had suggested the ways in which he tries to delineate silence. He refers to the Chapatti story during the Sepoy mutiny in 1857:

To me, you know, it [silence] is a much more empirical thing. For example, if you look at 1857, the fact that all these people were rising, the fact that they had a very high degree of coordination is actually occurring. You know, the chapattis are moving and the bangles are moving; obviously this is not a random event, yet nothing is said. There is no discourse, there is no programme. Just look at the strange way it occurred. I mean almost as if it were a precluding discourse.28

In a similar vein, in his essay, “The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi”29, Ghosh remembers the incident when he took part in the protest march after the anti-Sikh riots that occurred subsequent to the assassination of the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

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28 Appendix 1.
These are the incidents where protest or a significant action is perpetrated, often in an organised way, without a word being said. Fokir communicates with Piya without the necessity of verbal communication, though they come from almost two extreme ends of the social strata. Just by seeing the pictures Fokir is able to understand that Piya is in search of Dolphins. Ghosh has also said in the interview that he used non-verbal communication in the way Satyajit Ray had used it in his films, especially Charulata and Pather Panchali. Ghosh had often commented on the remarkable influence that Ray’s works have had on him—so much so that his liking for anthropology goes back to his watching of Ray’s Agantuk. Staging non-verbal communication in terms of language in fiction is a challenging task which is similar to staging such forms of communication in terms of the image in films. The combination of image and sound creates not only a unique audio-visual experience, but also a unique language in films. The moving image accompanied by sounds in terms of background music or words creates a meaning, where the sound and the image are inseparable. Unlike in painting or photography, the sound complements the image in films. The absence of sound, on the contrary, where the image is not accompanied by sound also creates meaning. The absence itself becomes meaningful. Silence, as is used in Ray’s films, with his manipulation of sound techniques often conveys meaning and becomes eloquent. Silence often becomes resounding, with its absence of sound as well as with its absence of speech. That which is unsaid or remains to be said conveys a lot in Ray’s films.

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30 Appendix 1.
33 Agantuk (The Stranger), Dir. Satyajit Ray, Perf. Utpal Dutt, Mamata Shankar, Deepankar De and Dhirmitan Chatterjee, (First Run Features, 1991) Videocassette.
Another fundamental aspect in Ghosh’s characterisation in terms of silence is the precept that a character cannot be known completely in terms of words. There are traits in the character which even the author from his location cannot completely comprehend. Silence then appends an additional dimension to the characterisation by adding both a sense of mystery and an element of unknowability. This restores to the character his own space within which he breathes. This is the space that cannot be appropriated by the author. This strategy is extremely suitable while dealing with subaltern characters. It is quite natural that the language of the elite would appropriate their voices. But, there remains a possibility that the subaltern may endorse a philosophy of life or art, which is not communicable in terms of the language of the elite, precisely because such language seeks to know the subaltern from within the periphery of his knowledge system. This would lead to a misreading of the world-view within which the subaltern locates himself.

By using suggestive silences in the delineation of such characters and through the use of non-verbal communication, Ghosh restores agency to the subaltern. Such characters in Ghosh’s novels speak through their professional activities. They derive their metaphors and their world-views either by being obsessed with their work or through a liking for their work. In a sense, for them, their action speaks louder than their words. Their protest against society is also registered in the language and idiom of their work. Fokir is usually reticent and shy when he is on the land, while is completely transformed when he is at sea. Dinu’s language of protest is expressed in terms of photography. Non-verbal communication thus acquires the dimension of deep communication. It is a communication that is based mostly on the felt experiences of the characters. It is through honest emotive responses to different situations that the possibility of deep
communication is rendered. It is an inter-subjective communication that is not hindered by the mediation of language. It is a way of communicating straight from the heart. Mangala’s silence belongs to a completely different order. It is part of a cult which believes in silence and secrecy. Mangala’s silence is powerful in that it establishes her authority and makes her incomprehensible and even situates her outside the purview of common language. The empirical aspect of silence, where communication is rendered possible without a word being said, is something that fascinates Ghosh. He refers to incidents where people coordinate themselves without the need of any verbal communication. Such incidents often seem to ignore the necessity of any form of discourse.

While referring to the protest march against the anti-Sikh riots that took place in Delhi, which I had mentioned earlier, Ghosh remembers one scene during the protest march very poignantly when the ladies in the group thwarted the confronting mob:

And then something happened that I have never completely understood. Nothing was said; there was no signal, nor was there any break in the rhythm of our chanting. But suddenly all the women in our group — and the women made up more than half of the group numbers— stepped out and surrounded the man; their saris and kameezes became a thin, fluttering barrier, a wall around us. They turned to face the approaching men, challenging them, daring them to attack.34

This is the type of communication that occurs between characters in Ghosh’s novel. Fokir’s communication with Piya is also based on such an intuitive understanding of each other.

Silence in literature has often been an expression of the limits of language. The impossibility of expressing our emotions in terms of language has always been pointed

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out by poets and philosophers alike. The sublime which often lies beyond human experience is also often considered to be beyond human language. There is always this something that cannot be known in terms of language.

The strategic myth of the philosopher who chooses silence because of the ineffable purity of his vision or because of the unreadiness of his audience, has antique precedence.35

In a similar manner, it is difficult to understand and express violence in terms of language because of the utter sense of banality that arises from it. Artists, poets and authors have often chosen to be silent because of the inexpressibility of language in terms of feelings, the inexpressibility of language in terms of the corruption that it has undergone through the ages. They have, therefore, often chosen to remain silent by refusing to write any more. George Steiner refers to two of the foremost poets in their language—Holderlin and Rimbaud, both of whom had chosen to be silent. After the age of thirty, Holderlin had completed almost all his works and then had been silent for the next thirty six years. Rimbaud also became silent in that he had not written poetry after completing his Une Saison en Enfer.36 The refusal to write is often a conscious decision to remain silent, for they find language inadequate to express their thought. When we watch or read, for example, Beckett or Pinter, a feeling always creeps up at the back of our mind that there is nothing left that is worth saying any more. Beckett’s experiment with this silence gets its culmination in his play Breath37. The play contains no character and no plot, only two brief cries with an intervening and an encompassing silence. Poets have often chosen to be voluble about silence. They have sought to stage silence, that is, to represent silence in terms of language. Poets like Hopkins, Rilke and few others have

36 Ibid. 68-69.
often associated divinity with silence. Rainer Maria Rilke frequently links silence and the divine, especially in his three part sequence in *The Book of Hours*\(^\text{38}\). The monk acknowledges the silent presence of God, which can be realised through prayer and meditation. Silence, to Rilke, is also a preparation. Rilke had stopped writing poetry for twelve years before writing *Duino Elegies*\(^\text{39}\) and *Sonnets to Orpheus*\(^\text{40}\), which are concerned with the identity of terror and bliss as well as the oneness of life and death.

Nirmal also breaks his silence and writes about the Morichjhâpi massacre in his diary. Silence has prepared him to be able to understand what was happening all around him. Nirmal possesses that empathy which enables him to understand the plight of the people of Morichjhâpi. Silence also provides the right environment from which one can reflect and muse on nature. Wordsworth finds it appropriate to reflect on life and other metaphysical thoughts in the stillness and silence of nature in *The Prelude*\(^\text{41}\) and in *Ode to Intimations of Immortality*\(^\text{42}\). Silence then prepares the poet as well as speaks to the poet. It assists the creative endeavour as well as becomes the creation in their work.

There is an ontological and epistemological limit between what can be said or expressed in terms of language and what can only be shown in terms of silence. The Computer AVA seeks to know everything in terms of information. It seems to dominate any type of communication that might be possible in terms of the collection of data and in terms of a logico-rational language. It is, however, countered by Mangala’s cult, which is

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\(^{40}\) Rilke, “Sonnets to Orpheus,” *Selected Poetry*, 225-255.


based on silence and secrecy. It is thus not subjected to the conventions of knowing, as is understood and determined by AVA. It is the type of knowledge that AVA seeks, and this is what forms the basis of Western epistemology. Ghosh suggests:

To me it [silence] has always been very powerful. At one level it has also been the political aspect of silence, and especially, you know, when I am writing *The Calcutta Chromosome*, what really interested me very much is this exhaustive march of Western knowledge—especially the sense in which the computer exhaustively wants to know about different aspects of your experience.43

The knowledge that is based on experience or an intuitive understanding of the world has often been undermined within such knowledge systems. Knowledge in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is not about the collection of information; rather it is a transformative type of knowledge that can affect a mutation of our selves. This knowledge is not based primarily on the rational understanding, but is chiefly grounded on an intuitive understanding of the world. It is not based on an opposition of language and silence or the rational and the intuitive; rather this type of knowledge advocates that they are both complementary as well as supplementary to each other.

**Knowledge and Language**

Silence thus offers the possibility of acknowledging as well as coming to terms with other forms of knowledge. There are different knowledge systems of the world with different prerogatives and different forms of knowing. It is, therefore, unjust that the European knowledge system should become hegemonic in nature and become so important as to erase, obliterate or silence other forms of knowing. It would also be unjust to judge all other forms of knowledge systems from the stand-point of European epistemology.

43 Appendix 1.
Europe becomes the only referent— and that too the silent referent— behind each and every discourse. I have, in the Introduction of this dissertation, already posed the question as to the dismantling of the master’s house with the master’s tool. It is probably possible when writers like Ghosh are able to be both self-critical and self-reflexive about the writing process itself. It is a way to escape the temptation of succumbing to any hegemonic voice or discourse. One must let the clamour of voices within have a representation without, so that one single voice does not appropriate all the other voices. It is the ethical responsibility that an author undertakes while writing in the age of violence, which redeems his works. Within the possibility of multiple representations there is the working of a sense of syncreticism and an empathy, which do not valorise differences, but rather luxuriate on differences. It is because of this acknowledgement of difference that the need to dismantle the master’s house does not arise, for the very attribute of the master is dissolved. It is not necessary to dismantle the master’s house, since the acknowledgement of other forms of knowledge would lead to the questioning of the master’s hegemony, and thereby announce the death of the master.

The metaphor of silence can be extended to the metaphor of the traveller. Each one of us is a traveller even if we travel or not. Our movement is not restricted to our body alone. We travel in time and space not with body alone but also with our mind. When we sit alone in silence or in meditation, we are travelling in the mind. Considering all the nuances of this metaphor of the traveller, we can say that Ghosh is a quintessential traveller: he is equally comfortable with both landscapes and mindscapes. He is at home “in our translated world”\(^\text{44}\). I have used the term ‘metaphysics of silence’ to suggest that silence is not absence, but rather it can be said that silence is presence in absence.

Silence, in this thesis, is not reduced to one particular point of view; rather I have dealt with silence as absence, as lack of sound, as a strategy of forgetting, as lack of speech and also as presence— that which makes speech possible and is a language in itself.

There are several points of convergences and divergences in Rushdie’s works as well as in Ghosh’s works. They have in their very different ways tried to grapple with history. They have experimented with narrative forms, so as to combine history with magic realism. They have dealt with the Partition and, in a sense, have explored India’s tryst with destiny. Even thematically, we have references to the Sundarbans and the loss of the relic of Prophet Muhammad’s hair from Kashmir in *Midnight’s Children*. In a sense, Sundarban of *Midnight’s Children* is redeemed in the Sundarbans of *The Hungry Tide*. The difference lies in the way they are represented— with derision and satire in *Midnight’s Children*, and a sense of empathy in *The Hungry Tide*; and this difference in representation is also reflected in the larger body of their works. The reference to Ray’s *Goopy Gayen and Bagha Bayen* is evident in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, as two of the plentimaw fish are named Goopi and Bagha. The similarities do not stop at the proper nouns; rather it extends to larger thematic concerns. The songs in Ray’s film are the stories in Rushdie, as they battle against the realm of silence. Rushdie as well as Ghosh have been greatly influenced by Satyajit Ray:

> The purpose the stories serves in Rushdie’s novel is analogous to the function of songs in the film *Goopy Gayen and Bagha Bayen*, both countering the principles of silence,

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In the battle between the land of Chup and the land of Gup, talk unifies the guppies as they prepare for war, while silence and secrecy create distrust in the ranks of the Chups. The shrouds of silence are torn away and the citadel is also found melting, as Bolo and the Gupwallahs are winning the battle. Freedom of speech is vindicated at the end. There is likening of the politician with Khattam-shud— as somebody who seeks to silence the truth. *Haroun and the Sea of stories* seem to be based on a classic dualism between light and darkness, Gup and Chup. The duality is among absolute silence, enforced silence or muteness, and incessant talking or chitchat. Speech, in this novel, acquires great multiplicity and polyphony, whereas silence is reduced almost to a single delineation— that of an enforced silence. The character of Mudra though is a welcome exception. A prevailing theme of the novel is that neither of these situations are or can be productive by itself; rather, mediation between absolute silence and absolute chitchat is necessary in order for productivity to occur. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* was written a year after Ayatollah Khomeini’s Fatwa (14th February, 1989) against Rushdie, and, therefore, in a way the text argues against enforced silence and tries to project the right to speech. Silence is also referred to negatively in many of Rushdie’s works. In *Shame*, silence is referred to as “the ancient language of defeat” and is also likened to death. Silence and secrecy acquire a completely new dimension in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, where silence and secrecy become parts of an alternative epistemology. Silence is here not
based on the opposition of the land of Chup and that of the Gup. In Ghosh’s works, the polarities of silence and language are dissolved, so that the land of Chup and the land of Gup both sustain and complement each other.

I would like to conclude my thesis by referring to an important epigraph in E.M. Foster’s novel, *Howards End*\(^\text{50}\), which I find is also relevant to Ghosh’s works. The intention of the novel is made explicit in the very epigraph itself, ‘Only Connect’:

> She would only point out the salvation that was latent in his own soul, and in the soul of every man. Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer.\(^\text{51}\)

The major theme in *Howard’s End* is making connections—connection between the private and the public life, connection between individuals; and the novel shows how difficult it is to sustain those connections. *Howard’s End* focuses primarily on two families: the Schlegels, who represent intellectualism, imagination, and idealism as well as the inner life of the mind; and the Wilcoxes, who represent English practicality, commercialism, expansionism and the external world of business and politics. For the Schlegels, personal relationships are more important than the public ones. For the Wilcoxes, on the other hand, social formalities and the rules of the business world reign supreme. The conflict as well as the resolution in the reconciliation of these opposing values is what make the novel enriching. If one can reconcile and accept different and even opposing values, one is not confined to seeing life in fragments. Ghosh’s choice of the fictional form is also probably because of this desire to see life as a whole. I will extend these motto to a larger context in Ghosh’s works, where he is striving throughout

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\(^{51}\) Ibid. 170.
his works to make connections between different knowledge systems, different ontologies, different languages and silence, so that one need to connect one to the other in order to make this world a better place. There is this notion of syncreticism that becomes almost an ethical prerogative in most of his works and these desires arise from the longing to connect. The connection occurs from varied perspectives: science is connected with the occult, with cetology, with ecology and with local myths; nation is connected with the family, phrenology, weaving and so on. The connection also occurs between individuals belonging to completely different strata of life. These connections flourish on the possibilities of deep communication or rather silent communication. It is this empathetic communication between two souls that Forster also emphasises:

It need not take the form of a good “talking.” By quiet indications the bridge would be built and span their lives with beauty.52

Fokir and Piya, in a sense, achieve this deep communication, where the necessity of words is lost in the silences. Ghosh’s novels not only acknowledges the possibility of alterity, but also takes a step further to celebrate this alterity. There is no privileging of one voice over the others, and this is clearly reflected in the self-reflexive type of narration that he adopts. Silence, in Ghosh’s works, becomes a subject, as we find in NourbeSe’s novel; it acquires polyphony of voices. The voices do not dominate each other, but rather co-exist side by side, thus complementing each other. Silence, for Ghosh, is that element of communication which provides the inviolate and inviolable space of inter-subjective interaction through the knowing of each other. Through silence Ghosh preserves the uniqueness of our knowing each other as well as knowing the world.

52 Ibid. 170.