CHAPTER III

RETELLING HISTORY

Retelling history is a means to retrieve the past. In the Indian English novels of the post-Rushdie times, fiction becomes a mode of retelling history. The unheard voices of the marginalised acquire voice and narrate their stories. The post-Rushdie writers retell the stories that remain silent, and reveal multiple perspectives on it. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie comments on the unhomed expatriate writers. He states: “most of these texts deal with the past; this is not unusual, as exiles, emigrants or expatriates are haunted by a sense of loss, some urge to look back” (91).

In the novels of Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, and Shashi Tharoor, their characters that are unhomed and rootless show a nostalgic longing for home. They recreate the past through memories and memoirs. Memories are the recollections of the past. “Memory,” as Dipesh Chakrabarty notes, “is a complex phenomenon that reaches out to far beyond what normally constitutes a historian’s archives, for memory is much more than what the mind can remember or what objects can help us document about the past” (*Remembered Villages* 318). Though memory is not a reliable source of history, it becomes a technique to retell neglected and unrecorded history. As perceptions alter, memories vary from person to person. History also differs with such changes in perspectives. The retelling becomes crucial for incorporating the unrecorded histories of the “other.”

Amitav Ghosh draws on memories to recapture the past in his novels. Memoirs and personal recollections are employed in his novels to narrate the ‘other’ histories. The first novel, *The Circle of Reason*, as it describes the displacements of Alu, the weaver across the globe also provides a parallel narration of the history of the lands he chooses to make his home. Through the reminiscences of the characters like
Balram, Gopal, Bhuddeb Roy, Shombu Debnath, and Bolai Dada, the colonial hegemony and the post-independence riots are depicted. Ghosh renders a parallel narration of socio-political history along with an account of the history of science and its major milestones.

In the section “Sattva,” Ghosh reveals a period of change in world history with the launch of industrialization and scientific developments. The invention of Pasteur’s vaccine for rabies in 1885 coincides with other significant political events like the formation of the Indian National Congress and the British annexation of Burma which also happen in the same year. The book *The Life of Louis Pasteur* which is a record of the history of the invention of Pasteur’s vaccine has a significant role in the novel. The impact of colonization that persists even after independence is presented through the character Balram, a self-proclaimed rationalist and a believer in reason. He was born in 1914 in Dhaka, where his father was a timber merchant. That was the year which saw the onset of the First World War. Coincidentally, that was also the year when Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi returned to India from South Africa. In August 1914, the colonial government of Canada stopped emigrations, which they thought would help them maintain racial purity. That year also saw the recruitment of Indians into the British army. Balram’s interest in science began in 1927, when electric lights were fitted into his house. This was also the year of the Simon Commission and the Indian national campaign for self rule. C. V. Raman won Nobel Prize in 1930, the year that witnessed more rigorous struggles including the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Dandi March. Balram also recollects the history of the campus politics of the 1930s. He narrates the history of such counter sciences as phrenology, as he recalls Madame Curie’s visit to India which coincides with the beginning of his obsession with phrenology.
Ghosh describes the arrival of Alu in Lalpukur and points out how he becomes an apprentice to Shombu Debnath, the weaver over the 1950s. Through the recollections of Shombu, the author provides a narration of the history of the cotton industry and weaving in the Indian subcontinent. Ghosh considers this as “a gory history in parts, a story of greed and destruction. Every scrap of cloth is stained by a bloody past. But it is the only history we have and history is hope as well as despair” (Circle 56). The art of weaving becomes man’s initiation into the world of mechanisation. Shombu Debnath says:

The first example of a mechanical man was the ‘Man at the looms’. The loom had, at one point of time existed as a bridge that had connected the continents and had made the world undivided. The weaving and trade of cloth is traced back to the time when man began to build houses to live in. India first gave cotton, Gossypium Indicus, to the world. The cities of the Indus Valley grew cotton as early as 1500 B.C. But soon cotton was busy spinning its web around the world. It had king Sennacherib of Mesopotamia in its toils by 700 B.C, and before long it had found its way to Herodotus in Greece. (Circle 57)

The history of Indian cotton cloth, first found in the tombs of the Egyptian Pharaohs, leads to a narration of the trade relations between countries. This reveals the history of the silk route to China which traversed Central Asia, Persia, the Ports of the Mediterranean and the markets of Europe and Africa. The trade relations retell the history of colonial domination. Ghosh narrates the role of the Lancashire cotton in bringing about colonization and slavery.
Lancashire poured out its waterfalls of cloth and the once cloth hungry and peaceful Englishmen and Dutchmen and Danes of Calcutta, Chandanagar, Madras, and Bombay turned their trade a garrote to make every continent safe for the cloth of Lancashire. Millions of Africans and half of America were enslaved by cotton. *(Circle 57)*

Ghosh points out how mechanisation and industrialisation lead man to modern science and technology:

In the mid-nineteenth century when Charles Babbage built his first calculating machine, using the principles of storing information on punched cards, he took his idea not from systems of writing or from mathematics, but from the draw-loom. The Chinese have used punched cards to discriminate between warp threads in the weaving of silk since 1000 B.C. The history that the loom has is not a peaceful one it has a history of violence and bloodshed too; of imperialism and colonialism. *(Circle 57)*

The first section of the novel reiterates historical events like the Dhaka riots of 1930 and 1964 and the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. The account of the fire that burns down Balram’s School of Reason recalls the Dhaka University massacre of 1971. Alu escapes this tragedy that kills Balram and Torudebi and flees to India. Jyoti Das the policeman who suspects Alu to be an extremist follows him to Bombay, to Mahe in Kerala, to Al Ghazira and finally to Algeria. Mahe was part of the French colony and had witnessed mass migrations to the Middle East in the 1970s. Rajan, a worker of the textile mills, provides a glimpse into the history of textile industry in Kerala.

In “Rajas: Passion,” the second section of the novel, Ghosh presents the history of Al Ghazira, a fictional re-creation of the Middle East gulf countries.
“Tamas” presents the life of the diasporic community in Algeria and their perspective on the history of India. The life of the migrants at Zindy’s house is a representation of the poor working conditions that torment the lives of the immigrant labourers in the Middle East. The stories that Zindi and Haji Famy narrate express the immigrant’s perspective on the history of the Middle East. The migrant workers who are shipped into Al-Ghazira are described as follows:

Those ghosts behind the fence were not men; they were tools — helpless, picked for their poverty. In those days when Al-Ghazira was still a real country they were brought here to slip between its men and their work, like the first whiffs of an opium dream; they were brought as weapons, to divide the Ghaziris from themselves and the world of sanity; to turn them into buffoons for the world to laugh at. (Circle 261)

The author recalls the Second World War and the subsequent oil boom that transformed the Middle East. The novel portrays the plight of the “cheaper and more pliable” labourers from Bangladesh, India, and the Philippines who migrated there in the mid-1970s. In the chapter “From the Egg Seller’s End,” Hajjy Famy narrates the history of the oilmen who overpower Malik’s Ghazira tactfully and transform the land of Al Ghazira.

Ghosh portrays the life of the diasporic community in Algeria and presents their perception about India in “Tamas.” In the guise of a respectable family, Zindi, Alu, Kulfi and the baby Boss encounter the Vermas in Algeria. Mrs. Verma wishes to present a performance of Rabindranath Tagore’s Chitrangada in order to give the Algerians a taste of her country’s rich culture and tradition. She represents the diaspora who strive to preserve their native culture and tradition in an alien
environment. Dr. Mishra and Mrs. Verma reconstruct the details of the Algerian revolution, the second Socialist Congress at Meerut in 1936, and the nationalist movement through their reminiscences. The realization that Dantu, the friend who had gifted the book *The Life of Pasteur* to Balram, is none other than Mrs. Verma’s father serves to highlight the history of the socialist movement in India. Mishra and Mrs. Verma reminisce about Mythili Charan Mishra, son of the socialist Murali Charan Mishra. Dr. Mishra criticizes the social evils that would ruin Indian society. He says:

Why don't we show them how all those fancily dressed-up brides are doused with kerosene and roasted alive when they can't give their grooms enough dowry? Why don't we show them how rich land lords massacre Untouchables and raze their villages to the ground every second day? Or how Muslims are regularly chopped into little bits by Hindu fanatics? Or maybe we could just have a few nice colour pictures of police atrocities? That's what 'our culture' really is, isn't it?

*(Circle 379)*

Ghosh weaves a big tapestry of memories and history through the narration of Alu’s journey to Bangladesh, Kerala, Al Ghazira, the deserts of Sahara and back to India.

In *Shadow Lines*, the memories of the narrator help build the fictitious world. Memory becomes the shadow lines that link and intercept the narration at various points as the narrator recounts the events of the past. The author retells the history of the turbulent times in Dhaka, London and Calcutta. The novel re-captures the historical events such as the Indo-Chinese War of 1962, the Hazrat Bal incident of 1963 and the Calcutta-Khulna riots of 1964. Tridib’s memories give the nameless narrator a perception of the lands that he has not seen. Mayadebi, Shaheb, Uncle Roby, Price and Nick’s grandfather, Lionel Treaswan, all are brought back to life.
through the memory narrative. The memories of Tridib and Mrs. Price retell the events of the Second World War. Tha’mma’s and Mayadevi’s memories reiterate the history of Bangladesh before the partition. Their memories present multiple perspectives on events like the freedom movement and the partition of India. Tha’mma’s recollections of her college days recount the events connected with the rise of the extremist movement in Bengal. The narration of the events that lead to the murder of Tridib retell the riots of East Pakistan and India following the Hazratbal incident of Srinagar.

Tridib’s life is recollected in bits and pieces from the memories of the narrator, May, Ila and Robi. His life takes the reader through several events in world history. Ila’s memories of her childhood retell some of the significant political events of Sri Lanka. Nick who returns from the Middle East narrates the plight of the migrants who seek jobs in Arab countries. Tridib’s recollection of Treaswan and his friends gives an account of the bombings in London during the 1939-40 war years. His memories provide a different perspective on the events of World War II and the Anti Nazi movement. The memories about Treaswan’s death recount the historical events of 1940 in London.

Memories, letters and memoirs are employed in In an Antique Land to recapture the history of Egypt in the medieval and modern times. Of the two lines of narration in the novel, one is a traveller’s tale, which recollects the days of the young researcher Amitab in the Egyptian villages of Lataifa and Nashawy and his revisit in the 1990s. The novel gives a fictional version of the author’s life in Egypt. The recollections of Amitab, the protagonist give a description of Egyptian village life. The ethnographer’s fieldwork becomes a documentation of the history of twentieth-century Egypt. The novel also narrates such historical events as the Revolution of
The second story line about Amitab’s research on a slave named Bomma is intertwined with the story of the Jewish trader Ben Yiju. Amitab comes across a book titled “Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders” written by Professor S. D. Goitein, in which he finds the name of Bomma mentioned. It appears in one of the letters written by a merchant named Khalaf ibn Ishaq to a trader named Abraham Ben Yiju in AD 1146. Amitab’s research on the identity of the slave takes him to the antique world of Ben Yiju, a Tunisian Jewish merchant in medieval Cairo. He had to flee to the Malabar Coast in AD 1132, after some dispute about unpaid taxes. There he marries a slave girl named Ashu of the matrilineal Nair community and takes an Indian slave named Bomma to be his agent in trade. Bomma’s story unravels the history of slave trade in the area. It points to a master-slave relationship that was more humane than it is today. “The slave of MSH.6 first stepped upon the stage of modern history in 1942. His was a brief debut, in the obscurest of theatres, and he was scarcely out of the wings before he was gone again, more a prompter’s whisper than a recognizable face in the cast” (Antique 1). Ghosh explores the history of the subaltern through the story of Bomma.

It is nothing less than a miracle that anything is known about him at all. The slave of Ben Yiju belonged to a moment in history when the only people for whom we can even begin to imagine properly human, individual, existences are the literate and the consequential, the wazirs and the sultans, the chroniclers and the priests - the people who had the power to inscribe themselves physically upon time. (Antique 16-17)
Ghosh reconstructs the cosmopolitan world of the 12th century and retells the history of trade in the Indian Ocean area. Ben Yiju represents the mercantile traders who belonged to the Palestinian congregation in Babylon. “They had the custom of depositing manuscripts in the Geniza of the synagogue so as not to cause any accidental desecration of any form to the name of God” (Antique 39). The Geniza documents testify to medieval syncretism and the multicultural spirit of the medieval transcontinental traders and thus serve as a record of the history of medieval Babylon. In the novel, the author recalls prominent historical events such as the German invasion of Palestine led by King Conrad III in 1148 AD, the arrival of the Crusader Army to Damascus on 24th July 1148 AD and the invasions of the Middle East by the Afrika Corps and the Italian Sixth army under the command of Erwin Rommel. Another letter of Khalaf ibn Ishaq to Abraham Ben Yiju in 1139 that mentions the slave, records the assassination of the Atyabeg of Damascus and the wars between the Muslim principalities that took place that year. Ghosh describes the European conquests that plundered both the knowledge and the wealth of the antique land. He says: “seventeenth century Europe was swept by a fever of Egyptomania” (Antique 60). The novel recreates the details of the well planned conquests of the Middle East by Karl Leibniz in 1670, its invasion by Napoleon in 1798, the gaining of access to Geniza by Jacob Saphir in 1864 and the transfer of the Geniza documents to Europe by Abraham Firkowitch in 1874. The author also talks about the collapse of the Arab-Indian trade as a result of the European naval conquests and mentions the arrival of Vasco da Gama at Kappakadavu on 17 May 1498. Ghosh retells these histories that have been swept into oblivion and seeks to represent the lives of the people of subaltern origin like Bomma of the medieval world and Nabeel of the modern world.
In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Ghosh reveals the history of the discovery of the malaria parasite by the Nobel laureate Ronald Ross at the end of the 19th century. This novel as John Thieme says,

interweaves traces of histories of late nineteenth-century malaria research, theological movement generally deemed to be heretical in the West, and slightly futuristic information technology inter alia- to provide the possibility of an alternative subaltern history, which exists in parallel with colonial history as an equally (or possibly more) potent epistemological system, albeit one which has traditionally operated through silence rather than articulation. (Khair, *Critical Companion* 131)

The narration starts from colonial India, proceeds to modern India and then moves on to the multi-ethnic world of global culture populated by migrant subjects, grappling with fragmented identities. The past, the present and the future are interconnected in this novel written in the mould of a science fiction. Mangala, Lakshman and Ross represent the past. Phulboni, Urmila, Murugan, Sonali, Mrs Auratounian, Romen Halder and Lucky denote the present, and the future is represented by Antar, Tara, Maria and Lucky. Science and counter science get intertwined as the author places western science against the oriental knowledge represented by Mangala and Lakhaan who manipulate Ronald Ross’s research. If Ross’s memoirs become a record of colonial history, then Murugan’s narration of the unrecorded history of malaria research provides an alternative history narrated from a different perspective.

Antar who comes across the fragmented piece of an identity card on his computer AVA, gets associated with Murugan’s findings that reveal how the Nobel
Laureate Sir Ronald Ross was merely an instrument of some cult practitioners. Sir Ronald Ross who wins the Nobel Prize in 1902 for his discovery of the malaria parasite is presented as a stereotypical British colonial. Murugan says:

The real hunting, shooting, fishing type who, quite unsure of his purpose in life, initially took to writing medieval romances, then took to writing poetry till the big British general father intervened to make him part of the family tradition. Our family’s been here in India since it was invented and there is no goddam service here that doesn’t have a Ross in it. He is made to join the medical service. (*Calcutta 44*)

The book *Memoirs of Ronald Ross* that provides a detailed chronicle of Ross’s research becomes a record of the colonial history of malaria research, which is juxtaposed with Murugan’s Theory of the Other Mind that reveals a subaltern history. Murugan’s works titled “Certain Systematic Discrepancies in Ronald Ross’s account of Plasmodium” and “An Alternate Interpretation of Late 19th Century Malaria Research: Is there a Secret History?” become counter histories. Murugan’s conversation with Antar reveal the history of research in malaria conducted by such scientists as Bignami, Celli, Golgi, Marchiafava, Kennan, Nott, Canalis, Beauperthuy, Laveran, Robert Koch, Danilewsky, Romanowsky and W. G. Mac Callum. Ghosh introduces historical personages like Elijah Farley, J. W. D. Grigson, D. D. Cunningham, Countess Pongracz, Mme. Blavatsky and Mme. Liise Salminen in his fiction. He weaves in the history of the Theosophical Society of India and points out the influence of Alexandrian philosophy on the spiritualists of the colonial period.

In *The Glass Palace*, Jaya’s son, the author persona, narrates the story of his family’s past. Through the story of the Raha family of four generations, Ghosh covers the history of three countries, Burma, India and Malaya, between 1885 and 1996.
Ghosh recaptures an unrecognized past through the memories and recollections of the characters. The novel retells the great historical events from the British annexation of Burma in November 1885, to the Burmese struggle for democracy under the leadership of their pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi. It also follows the life of King Thebaw and Queen Supalayat of the Royal Burmese clan, in exile in Ratnagiri in India. King Thebaw’s recollections recount the glorious past of a Golden Burma and narrates the plight of the deported royal family.

The history of the royal family of Burma is intertwined with the life of Rajkumar, an orphan who flees from Chittagong with his mother to escape a killer fever. He survives, but loses his mother. With the help of Saya John, a Chinese from Singapore, and Doh Say of Mandalay, Rajkumar makes the best of the troubled situation in Burma and makes a fortune from teak business. The novelist presents the onset of industrialization and the changes in the world economy through the lives of Rajkumar and Saya John. The life of Saya John also represents the rise and fall of the teak trade and the entry of rubber trees in the world economy. Saya John’s death becomes an occasion to recollect the turbulent period of the Second World War. The Morningside Rubber Plantation of Rajkumar and Saya John in Malaya becomes a corporate plantation with the rise in labour movements. The downfall of capitalism, and the entry of oil palms to replace the rubber trees and the transport of indentured labourers to work in the plantations are narrated by Jaya in her conversation with Ilango.

Rajkumar, who had first seen Dolly at the time of the deportation of the royal family from the Glass Palace, meets her again after twenty years in Ratnagiri. With the help of Beni Prasad Dey, the collector of Ratnagiri, Rajkumar marries Dolly and takes her to Rangoon. Through the narration of their lives the history of Burma as a
British province is revisited in the novel. The death of Beni Prasad Dey following the dispute connected with the miscegenation of the Burmese princess represents the agony of the Indian officials in British administration who struggle to mimic and impress the colonizer. The life of Uma Dey, the collector’s widow who returns to India and becomes a social reformer represents the history of pre-Independence India. The Japanese invasions and the events connected with the World War are recounted in a conversation between the King, the Queen and the Collector. The exiled King Thebaw and Queen Supalayat strive to preserve their culture and traditions in Ratnagiri. The Queen expresses her discontent and foretells the future of colonial domination. She says:

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

The story of the Indian soldiers Arjun, Kishen Singh and Hardayal portrays the plight of the Indian soldiers of the British Army. The Sepoy Mutiny is mentioned in the narration. Arjun, tormented by the guilt of serving the colonizer and caught in the dilemma of divided loyalty quits the British Army but gets killed in the guerrilla wars. The novel also narrates the history of the indentured labourers who migrated from India to Burma and the initiation of the guerrilla wars. The history of teak trade that made the immigrants wealthy and the natives paupers is recollected through the memory of some of the characters. The untold or suppressed stories of the Indian National Army under the British Raj are retrieved. The events connected with the
Second World War that generated a large number of war refugees are recollected in the novel. Dolly and Rajkumar with widowed Manju and her daughter Jaya become part of the Long March from Burma to India. Rajkumar and Dolly find refuge with Uma Dey in Calcutta. Dinu the youngest son of Rajkumar, whom Jaya meets at the studio Glass Palace, talks about the political turmoil in Burma following and the rise of democracy and the nationalist movements.

_The Hungry Tide_ focuses on the culture and history of Sundarbans, the tide country. The novel that appeared as an ethnographic study of the Sundarbans presents the life on the land that is transformed constantly by the ebb and fall of the tides and the fluctuating fortunes of the governing powers. Just as the tides transform the land of Sundarbans, the waves of changes affect the socio-political and anthropological history of the land. The stories of Daniel Hamilton, Lucy, Nirmal, Nilima, Piyali Roy, Kanai Dutt, Horen, Kusum, Fokir and Moyna represent the history of the unstable land from different perspectives.

Sundarbans is the natural habitat of many endangered species, which include the Royal Bengal Tiger and the Irrawaddy dolphins. It is also the home of the mangrove forest or the Sundari trees. The geographical details of the land are found in Nirmal’s diary:

There is no prettiness here to invite the stranger in: yet, to the world at large this archipelago is known as the Sundarbans, which means, ‘the beautiful forest.’ There are some who believe the word to be derived from the name of a common species of mangrove, the sundari tree, _Heriteria minor_. In the record books of the Mughal emperors this region is named not in reference to a tree but to a tide — bhati. And to the inhabitants of the islands this land is known as bhatir desh - the tide
country, except that bhati is not just the ‘tide’ but one tide in particular, the ebb-tide: it is only in falling that the water gives birth to the forest. To look upon this strange parturition, mid-wived by the moon, is to know why the name ‘tide country’ is not just right but necessary. (*Hungry* 8)

Amitav Ghosh attempts to trace the voices that remain unheard and narrates the history of the other in this novel. The land which is a reserve forest for the Bengal tigers has no means to protect the native inhabitants. Superstitious beliefs about the overpowering presence of tigers, crocodiles and cyclones control the lives of the inhabitants. The author narrates the Morichjhapi incident of 1979 in the words of some of his characters. Here, for example, is Nilima’s description of the settlement:

In this place where had been no inhabitants before there were now thousands, almost overnight. Within a matter of weeks, they had cleared the mangroves, built baths and put up huts. It happened so quickly that in the beginning no one even knows who these people were. But in time it came to be learnt that they were refugees, originally from Bangladesh. Some had to come to India after partition, while others had trickled over later. In Bangladesh, they had been among the poorest of rural people, oppressed and exploited both by Muslim communalists and by Hindus of the upper caste. (*Hungry* 118)

The refugees at Morichjhapi attempt to build a new life. Nirmal’s diary gives a record of the refugee initiatives to create their idealistic world in the uninhabited island.

Saltpans had been created, tube wells had been planted, water had been dammed for the rearing of fish, a bakery had started up, boat builders
had set up workshops, a pottery had been founded as well as an ironsmith’s shop; there were people making boats while others were fashioning nets and crab lines; little market places, where all kinds of goods were being sold, had sprung up. (*Hungry* 204)

The massacre and cruel eviction of these refugees in 1979 is recalled in Kusum’s narration. She recounts the history of the cruel oppression of the subalterns to Horen and Nirmal:

> The worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, was worth less than dirt or dust. ‘This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is a part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all around the world.’ Every day, sitting here, with hunger gnawing at our bellies, we would listen to these words, over and over again. Who are these people, I wondered, who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them? Do they know what is being done in their names? Where do they live, these people, do they have children, do they have mothers, fathers?....our fault, our crime was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil. (*Hungry* 284)

Ghosh questions the government policy of prioritizing animals over human beings. The human beings who are at the risk of becoming prey to the predators remain helpless and victimised whereas the predator is preserved. Piyali represents the voice of the ecologists who prefer the endangered species over the human beings. Her
concern is more for animals and marine mammals than for the natives. She keeps aloof from the locals until Fokir and Tutul save her. Her experiences in the tidal land transform her and through her association with Kanai and Nilima she understands the plight of the victimized people of the land.

Piya’s research gives a rewriting of the history of the aquatic mammals. Her recollections about other biologists like Jane Goodall and Helen Mash become the narration of the history of a different kind. Her story indicates that there are myths in science as there are in folk life. “She recalled the mythologies of discovery that had attracted her to the sciences as a child, and how the most miraculous seemed always to be those that had quotidian origins - Archimedes and his bathtub, Newton and his apple” (Hungry 132). Piya’s narration of her cetacean pilgrimage to Kanai is also a retelling of the history of research on Gangetic dolphins. Piya narrates the discoveries made by William Roxburgh, Pliny the Elder, John Anderson, Edward Blyth, and J. E Gray and points out that Calcutta used to have a significant position in the research conducted on marine mammals but this is not reflected in documented history.

Piya’s personal history also provides a glimpse of the life of emigrants in the U S and their struggle to survive. Kanai’s past connects with the past of Nirmal and Nilima. Nirmal, a Marxist from Bengal, marries his student Nilima. Due to his involvement in politics, Nirmal is forced to take shelter in the Sundarbans. The childless couple work for the betterment of society, Nirmal as a school teacher and Nilima through the Bodabon Trust. At the heart of Nirmal’s diary is an historical event: the eviction of the refugee settlers from the island of Morichjhapi in the Sundarbans by the Left Front government of West Bengal in 1979. For Nirmal, a Marxist, this act of state violence is a brutish betrayal. The refugees are promised resettlement, but the conditions of such resettlement are harsh and alien. In 1978, a
group of refugees flee from the Dandakaranaya camp in Madhya Pradesh and come to the island of Morichjhapi with the intention of settling there. They clear the land for agriculture and begin to fish and farm. However, their presence there alarms the government, who consider it as the first of a possibly endless series of encroachments on protected forestland, and the settlers are evicted in a brutal display of state power. Nirmal has been helping the victims as part of his attempt to reclaim his lost past. He was with the settlers during those final hours. The brutality shatters him.

Nirmal’s journal unravels the political history of the land and recalls an eccentric, wealthy Scotsman, who in “1903, buys ten thousand acres of tide country from the British Sarkar” (Hungry 54). The land owes its existence to the visionary ambition of Sir Daniel MacKinnon Hamilton. Hamilton’s dream is to build a utopian land of no differences “where no one could exploit anyone” and people would “live without petty social distinctions and differences” (Hungry 56). The names of the places in the tidal country like “Lusibari,” “Emilybari,” “Rangabelia,” “Rajat Jubilee,” reflect this connection with history. Nirmal records in his journal: “There was even a telephone line here. Long before phones had come to Kolkota, S’Daniel put in phones in Gosaba. Everything was provided for nothing was left to chance. There was a Central Bank of Gosaba and there was even Gosaba currency” (Hungry 56). Ghosh includes this failed dream as another narration of a suppressed history. The history of Port Canning is narrated in the novel. Ghosh also makes a mention of the shipping inspector Henry Paddington, who names the ferocious storms as cyclones.

Nirmal in Kanai’s words is “possessed more by words than by politics” (Hungry 282). The poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke has a lot of influence on Nirmal. Kanai speaks of him as one who considers himself a “historical materialist” which
“for him meant that everything which existed was interconnected: the trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature” (Hungry 306). The characters in the novel are caught between the forces of nature and the pressures of civil society. Ghosh focuses on the crisis caused by the waves of change that bring about drastic transformations. Nirmal sums up this idea in this way: “Now, with the rising of the sun, I have understood what it is: I am afraid because I know that after the storm passes, the events that have preceded its coming will be forgotten. No one knows better than I how skilful the tide country is in silting over its past” (Hungry 74). Kanai’s recollections of his childhood visit also recreate the past of the tide country. Kanai remembers Nirmal’s angry words in response to his description of Canning as “a horrible, muddy town.” Nirmal had said, “A place is what you make of it” (Hungry 283). This reverberates through the story as it recalls how Kanai and Piyali decide to settle down at the Sunderbans and fulfil the dream of Nirmal and Fokir.

Kanai also recalls in his memory the story of Kusum, Fokir’s mother who was living at that time under the care of the Trust run by Nilima. Kusum’s story epitomizes the life of the doubly oppressed women of the land. Colonialism and its agents pose a deep threat to the natives who are lured into accepting jobs as labourers at faraway places like Kolkata, where they are exploited in several ways. Kusum’s mother, who ends up in prostitution, is a victim of such oppression. Rajen marries Kusum and saves her. The oppression and exploitation of women during the years of political crisis are described through Kusum’s story. Widowed and helpless, she and her son join the refugees at Morichjhapi and become victims of the state-sponsored massacre of 1979.

Sea of Poppies is a rewriting of two great historic events of the 19th century: the cultivation of opium as a cash crop in Bengal and Bihar, and the transport of
Indian indentured workers against the backdrop of the hegemony established by British imperialism in nineteenth century India. The novel chronicles the history of diaspora and migration following colonization. The three-year Opium War between the British and the Chinese forms the background to the story. The writer retells the history of imperialism in the colonial world. The Asia of 1838 that witnessed the beginning of the migration of the indentured labour from India to the British plantations in Mauritius and other places is presented in the novel. The story of a rich land becoming an underdeveloped nation due to colonial exploitation is depicted through the memories of the characters.

The novel reveals the history of rural India under the British Raj in the 1830s. Having realized the scope of the opium trade with China, the British enforce opium cultivation in India. Ghosh presents the life of Deeti, a victim of opium cultivation, to narrate this history. The social evils like caste system and Sati in rural India are presented through the story of Kaluah the outcaste, who saves Deeti from her husband’s funeral pyre. They both board the ship *Ibis* as indentured workers in the hope of changing their destiny. *Ibis* is a platform where different characters like Paulette, Serang Ali, Zachary, Deeti, Kaluah, Neel Rattan, Ah Fatt, Baboo Nobkissin and Jodu meet to become “jahazbais.” The ship becomes a medley of diverse cultures, traditions, customs and religions. The ship however is not free from the vices and evils of the land. This is evident in the words of Captain Chillingworth:

> The difference is that the laws of the land have no hold on the water. At sea, there is another law, and you should know that on this vessel I am its sole maker. While you are on the ibis and while she is at sea, I am your fate, your providence, your lawgiver. This chabuk you see in
my hands is just one of the keepers of my law. But it is not the only one- there is another. (Sea 404)

The characters Zachary, Captain Chillingworth and Serang Ali, present the story of the sailors. Ghosh gives a realistic depiction of the atrocities that take place at the sea. The story of Raja Neel Rattan, a victim of the opium trade, retells the history of the wealthy landowners who are cheated into losing their property to the British Raj. Ah Fatt, the half-Chinese opium addict whom Neel meets in the prison, effects a transformation that is good for both of them.

Zachary Reid, the young sailor from Baltimore is a victim of apartheid. He leaves America because of his status as an octoroon. His memories reveal the plight of the people discriminated against in America. At the hands of Serang Ali who has a past as a pirate, Zachary makes a complete transformation of identity and becomes the second mate of the ship. The history of botanical research in India is presented in the novel through Paulette Lambert, the orphaned daughter of a French botanist. Jodu the lascar is the son of Paulette’s Bengali foster mother. With the death of her parents she ends up in the household of Benjamin Burnham, the rich opium trader and the owner of the Ibis. The extravagant life style of the imperial colonizers is represented by Mr Burnham.

Ghosh describes the lifestyle, customs and social practices surrounding the lives of the individuals who are thrown together on the Ibis. He uses language as a marker of diverse aspects of the untold past. The sea-farer’s language, Bhojpuri, Laskari and Hindustani are blended in the narration. Hybrid languages such as Zachary’s sea dialect, Paulette’s French dominated dialect, Baboo Nob Kissin’s malapropisms and the colonizer’s pidgin language serve as markers of the land’s cultural history.
Ghosh’s *River of Smoke*, narrates the history of the opium trade in Canton in China. According to recorded history, the Arabs introduced the use of opium for medicinal purposes into China. In the 17th century, the Portuguese initiated the practice of smoking tobacco mixed with opium. With the colonization of Burma and India, the British began the drug trade in China and the British East India Company established monopoly over the opium trade. With the first order to restrict the trade in 1820, the British made use of middle men, pirates and drug dealers to smuggle in opium. In 1838, the Chinese Emperor appointed Lin Zexu as the High Commissioner to Canton with the powers to arrest the Chinese opium dealers and put an end to the trade once and for all. When the merchants refused to surrender the cargo, the High Commissioner placed the foreign residents under a virtual siege until they surrendered their cargo. The authorities seized the cargo and sentenced the drug dealers to death. The British merchants retaliated with the Opium War of 1838.

Ghosh sets his novel in Canton and gives a graphic picture of Canton's market, the boat people, the opium dens, the smugglers and the trading posts or factories of the foreign merchants called the Hongs. The novel has a wide array of characters whose stories narrate the life of the diasporic community of Fanqui-town, the foreign enclave in Canton. Its denizens are mostly from India and are known as the “Achhas.” It is “a world in itself, with its own foods and words, rituals and routines, where Indians of motley origin, hailing from different regions, speaking different languages and ruled by different political dispensations, come together into a consciousness of their Indianness” (*River* 185). The history of imperialism and its trade relations, its culture, and its contributions to the world in arts, literature and culture are depicted in the novel that retells the political, cultural and social history of China.
The five men who disappear in a storm in *Sea of Poppies* reappear in the second book of the *Ibis* trilogy. Neel, the deported zamindar, gives a description of the hurricane: “examining everything it passed over, upending somethings, leaving other things unscathed; looking for new possibilities, creating fresh beginnings, rewriting destinies and throwing together people who would never have met” (*River* 20). Aditi Kalua transformed as Deeti Colver in Mauritius, represents the life of a diasporic migrant. Through her nostalgic recollections, the night of the storm in September 1838 that transformed the destiny of the travellers on the *Ibis* is recollected. When Neel visits Deeti’s shrine, he adds the picture of the central character Bahramji Nauroji Modi to the drawings. Through the narration of the life of Bahram Modi, Ghosh presents the history of the Parsis in Mumbai, their migrations and professions that vary from textiles, ship making, export and trade. In Canton, Bahramji is a successful entrepreneur, the only Indian member of the Committee of the Western-led Chamber of Commerce, the lover of a Chinese boatwoman, Chi-Mei. But in India he is a poor, childless son-in-law of a rich family. The huge consignment of Indian opium on the ship *Anahita* was his final attempt to make a fortune, prove his worth and liberate himself from the rigidity of social hierarchies. The Chinese ban on the opium trade ruins his business and drives him to his death.

Neel as a Munshi to Bahramji produces the journals of the period that serve as records of history. Through Neel the history of publishing is reconstructed. Paulette inserts the picture of the Cornish botanist Frederik Penrose Fletcher in Deeti’s memory temple. Fletcher finds Paulette dressed as a man on an abandoned botanical garden on Port Louis, a previous French Colony under the British power. Paulette joins him on Redruth in his voyage to China and attempts to discover the mythical golden camellia. This furnishes a narration of the contribution of the Chinese to the
world of botany. The letters between Paulette and Robin Chinnery provide detailed accounts of the Western influence on Chinese painting, plant collection and preservation. The letters offer a different perspective on British India relations and on the culture and trade relations of the Fanqui town. Chei-Mei, Ah Fatt and Ho Lao-kin represent the victims of the opium trade. Charles King is among the handful of Westerners who support the ban on the trade.

Ghosh narrates untold histories and presents multiple perspectives on the recorded history. Historical events such as the rise of a new township in Singapore, the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815 and his deportation to the deserted Helena Island are mentioned in the course of the narration of the history of colonization. The novel depicts how the opium trade leads to an exchange of cultures, to language changes, to the formation of creoles and pidgins and to ambiguous migrant existences. Free trade, a predecessor to the present globalization, is justified by the British merchant Benjamin Burnham, who says: “It is not my hand that passes sentence upon those who choose the indulgence of opium. It is the work of another invisible, omnipotent; it is the hand of freedom; of the market, of the spirit of liberty itself, which is none other than the breath of God” (River 463). The diasporic voice is heard as Bahram Modi says:

Do you think they will remember what we went through? Will they remember that it was the money we made here, the lessons we learnt and the things we saw that made it all possible? Will they remember that their future was bought at the price of millions of Chinese lives? Was it just for this: so that these fellows could speak English, and wear hats and trousers, and play cricket? (River 527)
This reveals the fear and agony of the first generation migrants whose tale is narrated in *River of Smoke*. Through the memories of the characters, Ghosh in this novel retells the history of the margins.

Rohinton Mistry uses memory as a narrative device to retell history in his fiction. Being a diasporic writer he looks back at the nation from a perspective that is different from the perspective offered by official history. Mistry’s novels depict the life of the Parsi community in Bombay and their emigrant life in Canada. The twice displaced community, which has its people straddling between cultures, are represented vividly through the characters of Mistry’s novels.

The short stories in Mistry’s first collection *Tales from Firozshah Baag* are set in Bombay of the 1980s and describe the life of the Parsis against the socio-cultural history of the times. The stories in the collection provide the author’s perspective on the history of the Zoroastrian faith in India. The stories “Auspicious Occasion,” “One Sunday,” “The Collectors,” “The Exercisers” and “The Condolence Visit” show how the Parsis maintain their rituals and practices and preserve their ethnic identity in strange and difficult circumstances. The stories also present the changing attitude of the community towards these practices. The post-Independence period witnessed a large number of Parsi migrations to the West, especially to Canada. In the stories “The Squatterer,” “The Swimming Lessons,” and “Lend Me Your Light,” Mistry reconstructs this history and portrays the immigrant experience.

In *Such a long Journey* Mistry narrates the story of Gustad Noble, a middle class Parsi, who struggles to exist in a fast changing Mumbai. The Parsi community is depicted here as an elite minority that is forced to face the challenges of a multicultural society. The glorious history of the Parsis and their displacement from Persia to India are recollected here. The predicament of Parsis in modern India and
their agony of being a doubly displaced minority community are depicted in the novel. The protagonist’s struggle to survive in a hostile environment forms the pivot of the story.

The unexpected events that complicate the life of Gustad include his dispute with his son Sohrab over his education, his daughter’s illness, the death of his friend Dinshawji, the disappearance of his close associate Jimmy Billimoria and his own involvement in a money laundering scam. The novel is set in the complex political scenario that preceded the declaration of Emergency. The anti-minority attitude that dawned in post-Independence India is portrayed in the novel. Also presented are the events leading to the Indo-Pak war and the Indo Chinese-war. The Naagarwala case is retold from a Parsi perspective through the story of Jimmy Billimoria. The growing power of the fundamentalist groups like the Shiv Sena which threatens the secular nature of the country is also articulated in the novel. Indira Gandhi’s support for a separate Maratha state is blamed for the strengthening of the Shiv Sena. The nationalization of banks by Indira Gandhi is looked upon from the perspective of a Parsi. Dinshawji recalls: “Parsis were the kings of banking in those days, such respect we used to get. Now the whole atmosphere has been spoiled. Ever since Indira nationalized banks” (Journey 38). India's political turmoil during the days of Indira Gandhi is described through the words of Gustad, Peerboy Paanwallah, the doctor, Dinshawji, and Major Bilimoria. The novel records the contemporary political situation, scheming for political power, corruption, the rise of fundamental groups like Shiv Sena, other threats to the secular fabric of the nation, and also the economic crisis that made the common man’s life miserable.

Rohinton Mistry’s second novel A Fine Balance provides a fictional narration of Indian history from the period of Emergency to the death of Prime Minister Indira
Gandhi. Through the lives and memories of Dina Dalal, Ishvar, Om Prakash, Maneck Kohlah and a wide range of characters, Mistry weaves an exuberant tale and gives a diasporic perspective on the history of post-Independence India. These undocumented records of history reveal a story of the tyranny of power and the exploitation of the vulnerable in the name of development. The imperial rulers who dominated the country were made to leave only to let the native leaders occupy those vacant spaces. The domination, exploitation and corruption that thrive under democracy are depicted in this novel.

The family planning campaign undertaken by Sanjay Gandhi is depicted in the novel in all its cruelty. Family planning was made mandatory with the restriction of ration cards to only those who produced the sterilization certificate in those days. Om Prakash who becomes a victim of this reveals its ridiculous dimension. The deceptive election campaigns and the malpractices connected with the election expose the farce of Indian democracy. The draconian laws like MISA, the rules prohibiting public meetings and processions, and other severe restrictions curtail the freedom of the citizen. The student politics that is suppressed and controlled in the days of Emergency is also retold through the memories of Maneck. Avinash his friend becomes a victim of it. Dina Dalal the widow, Dukhi Mochi’s wife and Avinash’s sisters who commit suicide represent the women of the nation who are subjected to exploitation and oppression under the reign of the first woman prime minister of the nation. The eradication of beggary by enforcing bonded labour re-presents the irony of such initiatives as the “Garibi Hatao Aandolan.” “The City Beautification Project” which leads to the evacuation of the slum dwellers makes many homeless like the Beggar Master, Monkey Man and Rajaram. Dina’s hired tailors Om Prakash and Ishvar under the impact of these idealistic initiatives for development end up as
crippled and de-gendered beggars at the close of the novel. The tragedy of Om Prakash and Ishvar who flee from their village and become tailors in order to shed their caste identity and seek refuge in the city reveals the evils of caste discrimination that thrived in rural India even after the Independence. Their memories about Ashraf Chacha retell the story of communal riots from the perspective of the victimised minority.

*Family Matters* narrates the story of 79-year-old Nariman Vakeel and his family against the Bombay of the 1990s. It retells the history of the minority communities that had existed in Bombay without sectarian divisions. The story of three generations of a Parsi family is narrated, set against the backdrop of the communal tensions and bomb blasts of the post-Babri Masjid days. Mistry gives a diasporic perspective on the cultural history of a community and the socio-political history of the nation. The culture and tradition of the Parsi community and its concerns with the changing values are portrayed in this novel.

The elite position of the Parsi community in society is brought to the focus through a reference to their contributions as ship makers, traders and philanthropists. The orthodox values and beliefs of the minority community that faces the threat of extinction are portrayed in the failure of Nariman’s affair with a non-Parsi girl and his marriage to a widow with two children. Dr. Fitter and Nariman’s father represent the older generation who fear for the extinction of the community. The westernized younger generations who fail to balance modernity and tradition are blamed for this. The author comments on the children who escape into the world of Enid Blyton books to fantasize about the sort of British that aren't even in England and desire to migrate. Yezad belongs to this younger generation of Parsis who have to face the challenges of fundamentalism and who wish to migrate. The longing for home and the agony of the
diaspora are presented through Nariman’s opinion on migration: “the loss of home leaves a hole that cannot be filled” (*Family 254*).

Jal comments on the history of corruption in the nation. He says: “Corruption is in the air we breathe. This nation specializes in turning honest people crooked” (*Family 31*). The fear of not being able to live up to the expectations of his ancestors haunts Yezad and that leads him to Matka gambling. He believes that “Bombay is Matka and Matka is Bombay” (*Family 207*). The author gives a realistic depiction of the corrupt Bombay and narrates the incidents that lead to the closing down of Matka gambling. The novel also presents the attitude of the third generation of Parsis through Jehangir, Murad and their friends who bribe to get away with undone home work.

The question of identity crisis that arises out of the minority community’s feeling of insecurity and the fear of oppression by the majority ethnic groups are portrayed through the description of the burning alive of an old Parsi couple. The novel narrates the sectarian cricket matches played in schools that sow the seeds of communal strife even in the minds of children. The recollections of Hussain, a victim of communal riots become the retelling of the history of the post-Babri Masjid riots from the perspective of the victim. The history of the bomb blasts in Bombay is traced back to the time of the Second World War as Yezad recalls the Clock story. The Shiv Sainiks who demand a separate Maratha state pose threats to the minority groups. Their moral policing and communal extremism threaten the secular nature of the nation. They demand the change of name from Bombay to Mumbai, which becomes an issue affecting the identity of the residents. The circumstances that alter the architecture of the city also affect the residents like Yezad, whose memories could be retained only in photographs. Mr. Kapur the owner of the Bombay Sporting Shop, the
employer of Yezad, becomes a typical Bombaywallah who retells the past of the city by the sea through memories captured in photographs. Mr Kapur who becomes a victim of the Shiv Sena attack says, “No matter where you go in the world, there is only one important story: of youth and loss and yearning for redemption. So we tell the story over and over, just the details are different” (Family 228).

Shashi Tharoor uses history in his fiction as a way of talking about the past. His books *The Great Indian Novel*, *The Show Business* and *Riot* are fictionalized representations of history presented from a new perspective. In *The Great Indian Novel* Tharoor attempts “to tell, in an Indian voice, a story of India” (Bookless 25). He narrates the political history of India before and after Independence, in the frame of the great epic, the *Mahabharata*. The story of the *Mahabharata* provides the novel with the basic structure on which Tharoor has fitted the history of twentieth-century India, beginning from Mahatma Gandhi’s return to India in 1915 and closing with Indira Gandhi’s second premiership in the early 1980s.

The historical events are compared to events in the epic and the political characters are depicted as mythological personages. The Kurukshetra war becomes the mythical presentation of India’s freedom movement and the Mango Tax yatra depicts the Dandi March. Indira Priyadarsini or Indira Gandhi becomes Priyaduryodini. Draupadi becomes Draupadi Mokrasi, democracy, the child of an Indian leader and a British lady. Dritharashtra is seen as Jawaharlal Nehru and Lady Georgina Drewpad becomes Lady Mountbatten. Dritharashtra, the blind heir to the throne, represents the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru who was idealistic and was blind to reality. Pandu his pale brother who dies early is the mythical representation of Subash Chandra Bose who went against Gandhi’s non-violent movement and believed in the power of arms. Vidur represents Sardar
Vallabhbhai Patel who creates the Indian Administrative Service and offers wise decisions to the great leaders at crucial times. Drewpad, the enemy of Dritharashtra and father of Sikhandi and Draupadi, is the last viceroy of British India, Lord Mountbatten. The Pandava brothers together represent the Peoples Front, while each of them individually represents a part of the democratic rule. Yudhishtra, the dutiful mythological hero, represents the Judiciary system of the Indian Republic. Bhim the powerful denotes the Indian Army. Arjun, Kunti’s son of Lord Indira, becomes the media. Nakul and Sahadeva, Kunti’s twin sons begotten by the Ashwini gods represent the civil service and the Foreign Service of the Indian Republic. The Kauravas represent the Indian National Congress. Drona, their teacher, represents Jayaprakash Narayan. Kamala Nehru is given the mythical image of the grim Gandhari who chose to remain blind like her blind husband. Shakuni represents Sidharth Shankar Rey who kept dictatorial power over West Bengal during the Emergency and the Naxalite uprising. Krishna, who was Arjuna’s charioteer in the Kurukshetra war, is seen as Krishna Menon. Kanika, Duryodini’s adviser also seems to be made in his likeness when he becomes the defence minister in the Indo-China War. Karna becomes Muhammed Ali Karna, son of Kunti and Hyperion Helios and represents real life Muhammed Ali Jinnah, the Father of Pakistan. Lal Bahadur Sastri is recreated in the likeness of the mythological character Shalya or Sishupal. Shikandi, the murderer of Bhishma, represents Nathuram Godse, the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi. Hari Singh, the Raja of Kashmir at the time of India’s independence, is presented as Vyabhichari Singh.

The political events are portrayed in the form of caricature to ridicule the idiosyncrasies of politicians. Kashmir is presented as Manimir. Karnistan is Pakistan and Bengal is Gelabin. Comea is Goa and Chakra is China. The Emergency period in
which Priyaduryodini establishe\ndictatorial power is the Siege. Lord Drewpad’s announcement of the British intent to withdraw from India on August 15, 1947 and the agreement to the partition of India are also retold in the novel. The assassination of Gandhiji by Godse is presented as the killing of Bhishma by Shikandi. The story ends with Indira Gandhi’s coming to power a second time and is depicted as Yudishtra’s ascension to heaven where he sees Priyaduryodini being honoured. Veda Vyas who narrates the epic to the scribe Ganapathi justifies the retelling of history from a different perspective. He says:

For every tale I have told you, every perception I have conveyed, there are a hundred equally valid alternatives I have omitted and of which you are unaware. I make no apologies for this. This is my story of the India I know, with its biases, selections, omissions, distortions, all mine. But you cannot derive your cosmogony from a single birth, Ganapathi. Every Indian must for ever carry with him, in his head and heart, his own history of India. (Great 2)

In Show Business, Tharoor presents the “India of multiple stories, multiple perspectives, multiple tellers and multiple truths” (Show 229). Through the novel that revolves around the Bollywood hero Ashok Banjara, the author explores the social and political relevance of Indian cinema. In Bollywood the heroes are idolized. The myth of superstardom applies to the idolization of politicians and other celebrities from all other spheres as well. The deceptive nature of the show business is what Tharoor exposes in this novel.

The novel begins with the hero Ashok Banjara in the intensive care unit of a hospital, struggling between life and death. A flashback of his life follows which becomes a retelling of his past. Ashok Banjara's life is presented through multiple
perspectives. It is narrated through his own recollections, through the monologues of other characters who visit him in hospital and through the songs and scripts of the formulaic Bollywood movies that he had acted in. The novel becomes a fictional retelling of the reality of the Bollywood heroes and Indian politics. The money laundering scams and allegations regarding deposits of black money in the Swiss banks relate to actual incidents in twentieth century Indian politics and filmdom. The image of ‘the angry young man’ makes a clear association with the Bollywood actor Amitab Bachan.

In Riot, Tharoor retells the history of the communal riots in India as he narrates the story of the love relationship between Priscilla Hart, an American social worker and Lakshman, an Indian magistrate. The novel narrates the events that lead to Priscilla’s murder during the communal riot in Zalilgharh by a reconstruction of the past from the diary entries, letters and memories of the characters.

Through Priscilla’s memories of her childhood the novel retells the history of a country where the poor were denied all rights. Her diary becomes a record of history from the outsider’s perspective. In the letter to her friend Cindy she reveals her views on India: “So complex a land where women do not enjoy a respectable position” (Riot 159). As a volunteer of Help-Us, an organization for women, Priscilla comments on the pathetic condition of women and their secondary status in India. Her views on India are depicted in her poem “Christmas in Zalilgharh.” Rudyard Hart and Katherine Hart, the parents of Priscilla, revisit India after her death and through their recollections the novel retells the history of colonisation and the subsequent “coca-colonisation” of India. Rudyard Hart recalls his failure to establish the Coca-Cola company in India due to the FERA rules of 1968. The illegitimate relationship between Lakshman and Priscilla raises questions on ethics and values. In his letter to
Priscilla, Lakshman reveals the social history of India divided by language, region, caste, class and religion. He elaborates the measures taken by the government to preserve the minority’s rights. He cites the Shah Banu case and the government-funded Hajj trips to the Holy Lands to illustrate his point.

The Babri Masjid dispute is narrated from multiple perspectives in this novel. Ram Charan Gupta represents the Hindu perspective and Professor Mohammed Sarwar gives the perspective of the Muslims. Gupta supports the construction of a Ram Mandir at Ayodhya. He says: “In Ayodhya there are many temples to Ram. But the most famous temple is not really a temple anymore. It is the Ram Janma Bhoomi, the birthplace of Lord Rama. A fit site for a grand temple” (Riot 52). He retells the history of India’s secular past; he recalls legends about the pilgrims from all over India who came to worship Ram at Ayodhya. He narrates the details of the demolition of the temple by the Mughal emperor, which according to him was the pivot of the issue. Ram Charan Gupta unleashes his anger as he says: “All converts from the Hindu faith of their ancestors, but they refuse to acknowledge this, pretending instead that they are all descended from conquerors from Arabia or Persia or Samarkand” (Riot 56). According to him, “they are all atheists and communists in power, in our country people have lost their roots” (Riot 53).

In the interview with Randy Diggs, Mohammad Sarwar, a Muslim scholar tries to defend the minority psyche of Muslims. He says:

But who owns India’s history? Are there my history and his and his history about my history? This is, in many ways, what this whole Ram Janama Bhoomi agitation is about- about the reclaiming of history by those who feel that they were, at one point, written out of the script.
But can they write a new history without doing violence to the inheritors of the old? (Riot 110)

He comments on the “composite culture” or “composite religiosity” (Riot 64) of North India and points out that a number of Muslim religious figures are worshipped in India by Hindus like Nizamuddin Auliya, Moinuddin Chishti, Shah Madar, Ghazi Miyan, Shaikh Nasiruddin. He says: “Muslim didn’t partition the country- the British did, the Muslim League did, and the Congress Party did” (Riot 111). He defends his community and blames the Hindutva brigades for being the troublemakers. According to him, Muslims gave India what she needed most, “the most precious of gifts from Islam’s treasury, the message of human equality” (Riot 108). He highlights the plight of Muslim community and says: “Islam has now as great a claim on the soil of India as Hinduism” (Riot 108).

Gurinder Singh retells history as he speaks about the Sikhs and the way the assassination of Indira Gandhi had affected the country’s attitude towards that community. His memories narrate the riots and violence that followed the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984. Gurinder’s father recollects the trauma of Partition in which he loses everything. But he does not lose faith in his country. When Gurinder wants to give up his career in protest against the death of his nephew in the Sikh massacre, his father says: “You’ve got to care for this country like you care about your mother or me. The whole point about India is that this is a country for everybody, and everybody has a duty, the obligation to work to keep it that way” (Riot 197).

The fictions of Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry and Shashi Tharoor can thus be considered as narrations of unrecorded history. They present a different perspective as they seek unheard voices and find new meanings in what they hear. The rootless
migrant revisits the past to acquire new meanings on their existence. The memories of
the people, their memoirs and diaries become the means to reiterate untold histories. It
is through the retelling of history that these novels attempt to retrieve their self.