Chapter – II
Ontogenesis of the Self

‘Ontogenesis of the self’ implies a profound empirical formation of the ‘self’. It is the result of the turbulent experience of one’s urge for survival in a pluralistic world. The individual develops a social identity or a self-definition that includes how he/she conceptualizes the ‘self’. The ‘self’ is broadly defined as the essential quality that makes a person distinct from the ‘other’. The ‘self’ is the idea of a unified being which is the source of an idiosyncratic consciousness. It is also considered the agent responsible for the thoughts and actions of an individual.

Descartes is often regarded as the first modern thinker to provide a philosophical framework for the natural sciences as the idea of ‘self’ began to develop. Initially, Descartes arrives at a single principle: “thought exists”. In his *Discourse on the Method and Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes observes: “Thought cannot be separated from me, therefore, I exist. This is known as *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). It means that, if one is skeptical of existence, that is in and itself a proof that one does exist” (4).

Further, as many theorists observe, ‘self’ is programmed by one’s gender, relationships, vocational and ideological affiliation, ethnicity, and some attributes like homelessness, isolation and identity crisis. These entities are closely knitted to one’s interpersonal world and form the triggering forces for the discovery and formulation of the self. Quoting social psychologist Klein, critic Robert A. Baron in *Social Psychology* observes that “the self concept is a special framework that influences how we process
information about the social world around us along with information about ourselves such as our motives, emotional states, self-evaluation and abilities” (152-53).

Very early in one’s life, one develops a social identity, or a self-definition, that includes how one conceptualises and evaluates oneself. For a person, this identity includes aspects such as one’s name and self concept, and aspects shared with others. Familiar categories include one’s gender and relationships such as woman, man, daughter and son. These various categories are closely linked to our interpersonal world. The humans spend a lot of time and effort in thinking about themselves. To some extent, one tends to be self centered. That is, the self is the centre of each person’s social universe. One of the leading Danish philosophers, Soren Kierkegaard in his The Sickness Unto Death observes that “the self is a relation that relates itself to itself” (3). This carries with it the idea of a self as a process of understanding itself. A self has a certain consciousness of being a self. Humans contemplate their place in the universe and the cosmos, and form a sense of identity, looking for meaning and trying to discover the purpose of their existence.

However, the view of Kierkegaard is such that when one begins to ask ultimate questions, and contemplates existential issues of one’s individuality and personhood, one can understand one’s self. Kierkegaard further observes that “Most men live without ever becoming conscious of being destined as spirit – hence all the so-called security, contentment with life, etc., become desperate” (3). Meanwhile, in the formation of self, self-identity or self-concept is acquired primarily through our social interactions that begin with our immediate family, and continue with the other people’s life. Self is the
centre of each person’s social world. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel makes the revolutionary claim that “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged” (111). Hegel recognises that an individual’s self-consciousness never exists in isolation, that it always exists in relationship with an “other” or “others”, who serve to validate its existence.

Philosopher Immanuel Kant terms the self as ‘empirical self-consciousness’. A leading term for the latter is ‘transcendental apperception’. Kant observes in his *Anthropology* that “One is conscious of oneself as spontaneous, rational, self-legislating, free—as the doer of deeds, and not just as a passive receptacle for representations: I exist as an intelligence which is conscious solely of its power of combination of the activity of the self” (158-59).

Sociologist David Hume in his “Essays Moral, Political and Literary” claims: “Self is nothing but a bundle of interconnected perceptions linked by relations of similarity and causality” (4). Hume, being a Bundle Theorist, is of the view that “our idea of the self is just the idea of such a bundle” (6). While analysing the concepts of self, Nietzsche, in his *Will to Power* defines his fully-developed concept of the will to power as “the element from which derive both the quantitative difference of related forces and the quality that devolves into each force in this relation revealing the will to power as the principle of the synthesis of forces” (2). According to Nietzsche, the will to power is the fundamental component of human nature. Everything a person does is an expression of the will to power. It is the psychological analysis of all human actions and is accentuated by self overcoming and self enhancement. The will to power is the
summary of man’s struggle against his surroundings, environment as well as his reason for living in it.

Similarly, by drawing parallels between an individual and society, Martin Heidegger in *Authentic Existence* claims that ‘existence’ can only come into being when individuals arrive at the realisation of who they are, and grasp the fact that each human being is a distinctive entity. He observes: “Human beings realise that they have their own destiny to fulfill, and their concern with the world will no longer be the concern to do as the masses do, but can become an “authentic” concern to fulfill their potentiality in the world” (5).

The self, which is a construct of the socio-cultural elements, leads an individual to adapt to the environment in which one lives. Consequently, the self becomes aware of the situations and prepares to implement its needs in a socially constructed atmosphere. It intends to liberate itself from some societal norms, which remains a hindrance. The individual confronts some norms of the society. The self struggles to overcome such odds and fixes itself in the socio-cultural canvas of the society in its journey from the periphery to the centre.

As far as self is concerned in the post-modern and post-colonial context, the writer indulges in championing the liberation of the colonised self from the clutches of the colonial establishments. The post modern idea of self deals with the rejection of the hierarchical attitude of the colonial self by the oriental. Different discourses and historical assumptions are delineated by the writers to underline the necessity to rescue the subaltern self through gender narratives and also viewing things through the lens of the
subaltern. The writer’s aim is to identify himself with the ‘alienated self’ and to construct universal conditions, upholding truthfulness and rightness.

In recent years, Gayatri Spivak is associated with self, which is a main thrust of the Subaltern Studies Group. Critic Robert Young puts it in his assessment of Spivak’s work in his *White Mythologies*:

Spivak shows how analysis of colonial discourse demonstrate that history is not simply the disinterested production of facts, but is rather a process of epistemic violence, an interested construction of a particular representation of an object, which may, as with Orientalism, be entirely constructed with no existence or reality outside, its representation. (158-59)

The postmodern writer uses the description of the literary formal characteristics such as linguistic play, new modes of narrative and self reflexivity, to highlight the position of the self in a ever changing socio-politico-economic system.

While the early works in the colonised nations focus on individuals on the history bearing and history of suffering, the works of the eighties in the twentieth century project the history of creating. Being a product of the post-independence generation, the novels particularly focus on the post-independence scenario and project the individual in an unexplored role in the process of creating history.

To explore the ‘self’, the writer follows the conventions of ‘bildungsroman’. ‘Bildungsroman’ is a novel, which depicts the youth and maturing of a sensitive protagonist who makes an attempt to learn about the nature of the world, discover its
meaning and pattern, and in doing so acquires a philosophy of life. This philosophy is animated by a concern for the whole man, unfolding organically in all his complexities and richness.

Successful ‘Bilding’ requires the existence of a social context that enables the person’s inner qualities to unfold and lead him/her from ignorance and innocence to wisdom and maturity. Quoting sociologist Peter Levin, critic Robert A. Baron in his *Social Psychology* says that “journey towards individual development and social integration may not be a smooth one, and, indeed, the relationship between the individual and the society, is usually marked by hostility and systematic disillusionments” (48).

In political economy, economics, and sociology, exploitation involves a persistent social relationship in which certain persons are being mistreated or unfairly used for the benefit of others. This exploitation corresponds to one ethical conception of treating to the extent of human beings as mere “objects”.

In the novels of the eighties of the twentieth century, the post-independence era is the centre of focus, which is dealt under closer scrutiny than the earlier epochs. The protagonists of these novels propel themselves into the centre, refusing to let their identities be submerged by the forces of history. Stripped of the protective shelter of collective political and social movements, the individual stands alone, attempting to make his mark on the changing face of Indian politics. More often than not, the endeavour of the novelist/writer ends in disillusionment, but the very effort of analysing is a positive step in the right direction. Before digging deep into the issue of identity, it becomes necessary to touch on the two important, and poles apart aspects of identity. They are
essentialist and post modern views. According to the essentialist view, identity is fixed. It is obsolete. It is not altered or affected by other sociological and cultural aspects. However, this view is opposed by the post modern school. In short, in post modern theory, identity is relative, arbitrary, meaningless and fleeting.

Amitav Ghosh, a leading postcolonial Indian writer, writing in English is transnational and global in his vision. In his writings, one can see the reflection of a holistic overall framework of the ontogenesis of the self, stemmed from the experiences of rootlessness. Ghosh’s quest for identity is epitomised through the sufferings and subsequent creation of a new persona, free from social and cultural boundaries. He identifies himself with the voiceless in bringing out their difficulties, helplessness and passiveness before the high-handedness of the establishments.

Primarily, Ghosh deals with the identity crisis, which is normally stemmed from the exploitation of an individual/society. Moreover, while analysing the nature of self, he deals with various agencies that construct the colonial, religious, subaltern, native, political, post colonial, occidental, oriental and peripatetic selves.

The protagonists of Amitav Ghosh’s novels – mainly Alu, the orphan in *Reason*, Rajkumar, the orphan street boy, and the servant maids in *Palace*, the slave Bomma in the *Land*, Tha’amma and Tridib in *Lines*, Nirmal and Piyali in *Tide*, Murugan, Mangala and Latchman in *Chromo*, the dancers in *Dancing* and Deeti in *Poppies* suffer because of their insignificant position in the society. Later, they are able to accommodate themselves within the mainstream community. The search for the cultural identity and
the realisation of the material importance enable them to move from the margin to the
centre. But, in the mainstream society, they are unable to turn things in their favour.

In *Reason*, Ghosh highlights the agony of the helpless individuals through Alu, an
eighteen-year-old orphan. Despite having a mythological name Nachiketa, he is called
Alu, which means potato. Since his head is extraordinary in size, he is called by others as
Alu. “It’s an alu, a huge, freshly dug, lumpy potato. So Alu he was named and Alu he
was to remain” (*Reason* 3). Alu loses his socio-personal identity and is identified with an
inanimate thing. He loses his self worth and respect because of his nickname and
remains merely a vegetable.

Subsequently, Ghosh brings out the struggle of such homeless wanderers for
liberation. Alienated and rootless as they are, they fail to get assimilated into the
emerging structures of institutional power. Journeys are eloquent quest motif in
literature. In *Reason*, Alu, being falsely accused as a terrorist, moves from Lalpukur in
East Bengal to Malabar in Kerala, and then to the gulf port of al-Ghazira, finally to end
up in the sand dunes of El-oued in the Algerian Sahara.

In this regard, it is significant to note Howard Wolf’s analysis of the self. In his *Of
Manhattan the Son: Autobiography as a Creative form of American Writing*, Wolf
analyses: “The field of experience beyond one’s immediate boundaries both past and
future becomes a more demanding standard by which the self discovers and tests itself.
In looking inward or outward, the autobiographical writer finds traces of its
opposite” (45).
Similarly, the subaltern self of Alu undergoes a sort of difficulties for being voiceless. As far as Alu is concerned, he is an ‘unheroic hero’ and recovers various sufferings right from his uncle Balram’s household. Being an orphan, he has no choice but to live with his unknown uncle. “People were sorry for the boy, of course. It was barely a week since he had lost his mother and his father (Balram’s brother) in a car accident. It was hard after a shock like that to go away to live with an unknown aunt and uncle” (Reason 4).

Ghosh, seemingly suggests the disturbing predicament of rootlessness and non belonging that urges such voiceless people to move on in search of new pastures and to explore a sense of belonging. The struggle for liberation and the de-humanising sociocultural condition make the life of such people miserable.

Having been made an orphan by his destiny, Alu hopes to be loved by his foster parents. But Balaram, his uncle has not shown any love nor sympathy for Alu. Instead, Balaram treats Alu as an object for his experiment in phrenology, a study on the size of the head. In Balaram’s house Alu feels like a stranger: “It was not till many months had passed that Alu would enter the room while Balaram was in it, and even then he would stand at the door and look in often for hours” (Reason 8).

Through the character Alu, Ghosh suggests that such vulnerable people are not even safe inside the four walls of the family. “Balaram, who had for so many years spent all his spare time measuring and examining people’s heads, should have a nephew who had the most unusual head anybody had ever seen. No wonder he had run inside as soon as he sets eyes on the boy” (Reason 3).
Commenting on such homelessness, which questions the identity of the individual Pradip Dutta in his “A Voice Among Bullet Holes: Amitav Ghosh’s The Circle of Reason” observes: “The history of our sub-continent, especially of its northern past, has never been able to take it continuities and culture for granted. A life of constant movement and violence has necessarily serrated our roots” (74).

Alu is very much afraid when Balaram, who is interested in phrenology, approaches him since his head is like a huge potato. “As Balaram advanced with the claws held out in front of him, the boy shrank back, his knees shaking beneath his starched black shorts” (Reason 4).

Gradually, Alu settles down in Lalpukur. He joins the school run by Bhudeb Roy. But he is soon bullied out of the school by Budheb Roy’s sons:

He saw four of Bhudeb Roy’s son tumbling out of the window. But the fifth, a squat paunchy boy with a sprouting moustache, stood his ground in the middle of a pile of overturned benches and looked straight at him, with a curling smile … Then Balram saw Alu, sprawled on the floor, tied to an upturned bench. His chin had split open and his nose was dripping blood. (Reason 27)

The horrific incident at the school makes Alu’s self to be more alert and practical. As a result, he gives up his studies and decides much to the disgust of the respectable people of Lalpukur to learn weaving from a disreputable man Shombu Debnath. Alu finds weaving an easy art. He becomes a master soon: “Alu learnt quicker than Shombu
Debnath could teach. His loom poured one rainbow of cloth with magical ease” (Reason 75).

Thinking that life is becoming more fruitful now, Alu is very happy. But that does not last long. Soon, the war breaks out and Alu plunges headlong into his uncle Balaram’s plan of cleaning the refugee shanties with carbolic acid: “Lalpukur was churning like cement in a grinder, and Balaram was busy chasing its shooting boundaries with buckets of carbolic acid, his hair wafting behind him, in the germ-free air” (Reason 76). Ironically, the cleaning operation meant to destroy germs is helpless against the local landlord and owner of a school, Bhudeb Roy, the most dangerous germ of them all.

During the war, a plane falls on Bhudeb Roy’s school. Fortunately, there is no casualty. For Bhudeb Roy, it is a gift from the sky. He sells the parts of the plane to the villagers:

Parts of the wings sold well, too: people bought them to put across ditches and canals as tidy little bridges. Bhudeb Roy managed to coax a total of five bridges out of those two wings. He sold them for four hundred rupees each. There were good bits of glass to dispose of after that, and rubber, and a whole heap of nuts and bolts. (Reason 91)

Since Bhudeb Roy has insured the school building earlier, he gets the compensation. He considers himself immensely lucky. “A few days later the whole village learnt that Bhudeb Roy had been given several thousand rupees by an insurance company as compensation for the burnt parts of the school” (Reason 93).
Meanwhile, Balaram’s obsession with carbolic acid attracts the attention of the police. Later, in connivance with Bhudeb Roy, the police dub him an extremist and try to kill him. On being shot by the police, Balaram’s, house gets engulfed with fire and kills all except Alu.

Having been branded as an extremist by the police, Alu moves from Lalpukur to Kerala and then sets off to al-Ghazira in the Middle-East along with some labourers, who travel in search of material wealth and more opportunities. Alu’s self undergoes a drastic change when the fire destroys all the belongings of his uncle Balaram. This unexpected fire changes the life of Alu and Bhudeb Roy declares Alu a dreaded terrorist.

Because of such unexpected changes in Alu’s life, he is forced to sacrifice his love for Maya Debi, daughter of Shombu Debnath. Since nobody is concerned with Alu’s wish for a martial life, he suddenly bursts in front of his uncle Balaram:

I want …, Alu blurted out, I want to get married… What I mean is I already know some one. A girl. That’s what I mean.

You mean…? Balaram looked at him in disbelief. You mean … love? A love marriage?

Alu was almost tearful with embarrassment – Yes, he said, his voice a strangled beat. I want to marry Maya. Maya Debnath. (Reason 112-13)

But, Alu is unable to marry Maya. Being declared a dreaded terrorist, he is forced to leave Lalpukur. From this point onwards, Ghosh brings out the quest for survival of the self, amidst chaos and confusion. Alu begins to live on the edge. Jyoti Das, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, is told about Alu and his alleged terrorist activity.
Alu rushes to Calcutta, from there to Kerala, and finally on a boat to al-Ghazira. All the while, he is chased by the police. He even has to give up travelling by buses and trains. He moves through the Nilgiri forests. His life becomes away from the normal. This vagabondish nature makes him resolute to encounter all the hardships in his life.

Eventually, Alu moves on from disaster to disaster. He moves on from the shattering death of his uncle and aunt in fire, to the death and destruction of his fellow friends at al-Ghazira and finally to his friend Kulfi’s death due to heart attack. In Alu’s life there are no choices. He drifts from place to place and person to person without any will, desire or effort on his part.

It is evident that Alu’s self undergoes a setback. Ghosh suggests that such unexpected volleys of suffering make Alu dejected. Normally at this juncture, the self would lose faith in everything. In Alu’s case, fear and anxiety about the future heightens because of he being an orphan.

Being on the tragic side, Alu feels alienated. The sense of being abandoned makes him worried as he tries to achieve success, recognition and identity in a pluralistic and postcolonial culture. He inhabits a society in which he lives under great stress and tension, fearing the loss of status and identity.

In this regard, Ghosh analyses the identity crisis of the self. When Alu experiences untoward suffering, he himself is doubtful about his identity. Ghosh fixes Alu in the Kierkegardian concept of loss of identity, where the security and contentment of the individual concerned become desperate. Ghosh also echoes the German philosopher Sartre’s view of considering the loss of identity as the immediate
consequence of facing the possibilities of nothingness. Nevertheless, Ghosh focuses on the deep anxiety of human existence – the feeling that there is no purpose, indeed nothing at its core.

Ghosh suggests that when the self undergoes a lot of turmoil, including the doubt about the existence of identity, it becomes more assertive, paving way for a likening towards self assertion. Moreover, Ghosh claims that the isolation, which is because of frustration, is no more in Alu. His journey across the Indian Ocean on a mechanized boat allows Ghosh to depict the risks endured by thousands of Indians who leave their native land in search of a prosperous future. Being illegal emigrants, they hazard their lives by voyaging on frail vessels. The al-Ghazira section of the novel offers fresh evidence of Ghosh’s fascination with the diasporic consciousness and the precarious lives led by migrant workers.

Ghosh is one of the first chroniclers to document the exodus of thousands of men and women of the Third World to the Middle East in search of an alternative, and viable future to places like al-Ghazira. Looking at the oil town of al-Ghazira, Nuri the Egyptian, one of Ghosh’s displaced persons, observes an entire world: “Filipino faces, Indian faces, Egyptian faces, Pakistani faces, even a few Ghaziri faces, a whole world of faces” (Reason 26).

It is almost as “though half the world’s haunts had been painted in miniature along the side of a single street of the city” (Reason 26). Although these faces and places have filled the desert spaces of the Middle East, these migrants are not able to make al-Ghazira a home, because there are problems everywhere, no matter what one is paid, and
because “foreign places are all alike in that they are not home. Nothing binds you there” (Reason 271).

People who are away from their home work hard to earn their livelihood. Ghosh reiterates the fact that it is their urge and necessity that make their self to overcome many untold miseries and hurdles in their lives. Ghosh says that they earn money at the cost of love, affection, care, home, peace and many things. Ghosh himself being an immigrant sympathises with those who suffer in foreign countries by sacrificing love and affection towards their kith and kin. The nostalgic state of the self very often haunts the persona, thus making it emotionally and sentimentally charged.

However, the real awakening of Alu’s self occurs, when he is accidentally buried alive, while a new concrete building in which he is working collapses:

It was after all, the Star, one of the largest buildings ever built in al-Ghazira, not as long as the concrete tents of the airport, nor half as high as the tallest bulbs on the desalination towers, but larger than both of them put together. When it fell it was an avalanche of thousands and thousands of tons of bricks and concrete and cement, and Alu was almost exactly in its centre. (Reason 193)

Nevertheless, Alu is not frightened. Ghosh is of the view that the enumerable hardships that Alu underwent from his childhood serve as a shield from encountering the aftermath of such unexpected downfall. Buried under the two sewing machines amidst the rubble of the falling ‘Star’, Alu survives. The reason for the collapse of the building
is the disproportionate ratio of cement with sand. “Though parts of it were strong, the whole of it was weak because of bad cement and sandy concrete” (Reason 245).

Caught under the debris, Alu nothing but keeps thinking. When he finally comes out, Alu becomes philosophical and declares that money is the enemy of mankind. “It travels on every man and every woman, silently preparing them for their defeat, turning one against the other” (Reason 23). After rescuing Alu from the debris, Abu Fahl, his friend asks him:

Alu, what must we do?

And he said: We must have a war.

Abu Fahl said to him, ‘What kind of war?

And Alu said: We shall war on money, where it all begins. (Reason 241)

Through Alu, Ghosh narrates how money is responsible for many problems. Alu’s self, after undergoing a holocaust amidst the debris, comes out with all its opinion regarding the ills of the society. Ghosh asserts that unless this greed of mankind is not solved such problems will be a common feature in the society. Abu Fahl says: “Every one knows that the contractors and architects put too much sand in cement. They’ve been doing it for years. A cement shortage, they say. But actually the’re busy putting up palaces with the money they make from the cement” (Reason 244).

Ghosh suggests that when one reaches a ‘no return stage’ there starts the quest for progress and fulfillment. When it becomes one’s matter of survival, one attempts to overcome any sought of hurdles. Ghosh concludes the saga of Alu with a note of optimism as Alu decides to return to India. It is significant that Alu does not run away
like the others when the building falls. It is out of the rubbles of capitalism that he seeks a solution to the evils of money. But he is unable to fight against the evils of capitalism for being an alien.

The struggle for liberation produces new states and new boundaries, but along with it, homeless wanderers too. Alienated and rootless as they are, these vagrants fail to get assimilated into the emerging structures of institutional power. Ghosh conveys that the adventures that befall the protagonist, stress at one level the struggle between the power of cold, heartless establishments and the nurturing power of human qualities, which brings a healing touch to all mankind. Moreover, the disturbing predicament of rootlessness and non-belonging urge the postcolonial subject to move on in search of new pastures and to explore the sense of belonging.

Alu is brought out from the debris by his friends in the alien country. His self, in trouble discovers the cosmopolitan spirit. He realises that love and affection need not be confined to one’s country and community. Ghosh emphasises the view that Alu becomes a global citizen, when he sheds the narrow concept of the national self and follows the dogma of universal humanism.

Identity, as a subjective sense, an invigorating sameness and continuity of the ‘real Me’ or the ‘inner voice’ embodied in oneself constructs the Character. In contemporary usage, identity means, to be like others and yet also to have qualities that make one different from others. For instance, Alu has a universal identity, and also a more distinctive personal identity. Identity maintains a balance between similarity and difference in the face of an individual development and changing social conditions.
Owing to these changes, the individual assimilates the self, demands for change or adjustment, and also fulfil an inner desire for constancy. Alu as a whole and complete person, who is not fragmented into roles and scripts, participates in a variegated and often fragmented social life and yet maintains a continuity and integrity. In other words, from the personal identity of a being, evolves the social identity, in turn to a national identity to a universal identity. Persons with definite demarcated self know who they are, what they are doing and where they are going. But in troubled times, there is a loss of identity that results in a crisis.

The term ‘identity crisis’ no longer connotes impending catastrophe. It is now accepted as designating a necessary turning point, a crucial moment when the development must move one way or the other, marshalling resources of growth and recovery and further differentiation. This identity crisis reveals continuity, integration, identification and differentiation, which projects the self or personality. In Alu, these revelation and projection provide an anchorage against which he gauges his status, security and prestige in the social scheme. Alu’s experiences of success and failures arise in his voyage through life, forms the substance of life-writing that takes innumerable forms.

Balram in *Reason* personifies reason. How far an action is relevant to the present day situations is his only parameter for judging things and individuals. He is fascinated by the book, *Life of Pasteur*. Pasteur is his ideal, logic, his God. Rational thinking is his only goal in life. In *Reason*, the identity of Balaram is constructed from his childhood. As a boy, he wants to study science and emulate great scientists like Pasteur and Jagdish
Chandra Bose. But his teachers in Dhaka decide that he is good for history and direct him to Dr. Radhakrishnan, a teacher of Philosophy at Presidency College, Calcutta. There at Calcutta, Balaram’s favourite pass time is to study the size of human heads. Many times he faces trouble due to this compulsive habits of studying and commenting on others’ heads. But Balaram is made of stiff stuff. His uncompromising stand on rationality wins him a life-long friend, Gopal, who gets associated with a rationalist society. But Gopal, senses something wrong with Balaram:

As he watched Balaram go, Gopal had a premonition: a premonition of the disaster he would call upon himself and all of them, if ever he is allowed to take charge of the society. He decided then, with an uncharacteristic determination, that he would do everything in his power to keep that from happening. (Reason 50)

Quite similarly, Balram’s wife Toru Debi also senses foul and puts his books on fire. However, Alu could save just one book – Life of Pasteur, which instills a scientific temper in him. The rational, scientific self of Balram makes Alu a complete character when he carries the notion of scientific temper throughout his life. This reflects later when Alu encounters the Indians in El-Oued who pour gangagel on the corpses, thinking that it will clean the germs. But Alu says that only carbolic acid cleanse the body from germs. When Mrs. Verma pours carbolic acid instead of gangagel, Ghosh says through the character of Dr. Mishra that “The world has come full circle … carbolic acid has become holy water” (Reason 411). Through Balaram, Ghosh focuses on the rational self
and asserts that science and reason are the two paraphernalia to eradicate the social problems. To achieve this, he emphasizes the need for scientific education.

Ghosh’s views on the purpose of education are based on his nature and need. Education is the memorization of facts at one level. At another level, it is a tool to get a livelihood. And yet at another, it sharpens human sensitivities. It kindles social consciousness in children. Balaram, a school teacher, acting as Ghosh’s mouthpiece observes: “It would be wrong; it would be immoral. Children go to school for their first glimpse into the life of the mind. Not for jobs. If I thought that my teaching is nothing about a means of finding jobs; I’d stop teaching tomorrow” (Reason 52). Ghosh seems to suggest a pattern where children are trained on rational ideas. Their curiosity to learn should not be suffocated by authority. Their natural impulse to ask questions should be encouraged. They should be trained to find their own answers. Ghosh’s idea of education becomes clearer, when he deals with the bacteriologist Louis Pasteur’s life and education.

Pasteur’s life exemplifies the fact that education should be aimed at answering the common every day problems of people. Bread alone is not the answer. Several other forms of thinking are essential for the welfare of the society. Pasteur’s father was a poor tanner. The laboratory itself was Pasteur’s life. He did not come to science by thinking about the nature of existence and atom. He actually left the study of crystallography in order to answer the most common problem of brewers of France. For instance, he got interested in ‘What was it that made beer rot?’ Finally he came to discover the infinitesimally small germ and the good and harm it causes to human life. Life, therefore,
is the best teacher. Experience and exposure to real life situations are more crucial than classroom instruction. Education is for life, but better education is only from life.

When Balaram decides to start the ‘School of Reason’, after the collapse of Bhudeb Roy’s school, Shombu Debnath says:

It is your duty to teach others as well. There are so many people in the village today who have nothing to do, no way of earning a living. You could teach them a way and you must. It’s your duty, not just to them, but to yourself teaching is your destined vocation… You could teach them your craft and together we could teach them more than a craft. We could show them the beginning of a new history. (Reason 106)

Balaram uses carbolic acid as an effective disinfectant to keep the settlements of the refugees clean and free from dirt, disease and death. It also works as a psychological therapy, as a means of awakening the dormant villagers against the pressive suffocation unleashed by Bhudeb Roy, the village strong man. Balaram keeps a constant vigil on the drums of carbolic acid, which was taken as an act of sedition and extremist activity. This act of Balaram makes the police suspicious of Balaram and therefore the police is on the hunt for him. Unfortunately, Balaram and his wife die in the blast followed by the police raid instigated by Bhudeb Roy.

Besides the scientific rational self, Ghosh is endowed with a sense of history and political reality. In Lines, Ghosh’s own self manifests itself in the form of the narrator investigating the individual self against the forces of history and world’s political reality. But it is through Tha’mma, Ghosh reveals the plight of the people in the formation of
nations sarcastically. Tha’mma, on political reality and geographical boundary rightly observes “They know they are a nation because they have drawn their border with blood” (*Lines* 78).

In addition to the political reality, *Lines* focuses on the experience of a single family – the family of Tha’mma, which serves as a microcosm for a boarder national and international experience. The major characters in *Lines* appear to have an intimate relationship with history. Tha’mma has lived through the Bengal partition, while Tridib, her nephew pursues Ph.D. in Archaeology. The narrator, Tha’mma’s grandson visits London very often to “collect materials from the India office Library, where all the old colonial records were kept, for a Ph.D. thesis on textile trade between India and England in the nineteenth century” (*Lines* 13).

Tha’mma grows up amidst the Indian National Movement spearheaded by Mahatma Gandhi and the militant nationalists. She is quick tempered with a deep sense of freedom. She is proud, stubborn and strong willed. She is perplexed at the history that has led her place of birth to be so messily at odds with her nationality and has made her a foreigner even in her hometown, Dhaka.

Tha’mma gets married to a man, who gets posted in the neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Burma and India. She leaves Dhaka and goes to different places before finally coming down to Calcutta after her husband’s premature death from pneumonia. She takes up the teaching job in one of the local schools and continues to serve there for twenty seven years and retires as a principal in the year 1962. It is with this job that she brings her son up.
Tha’amma has an eternal love for her place of birth, Dhaka and cannot forget it any way. The partitioned India and the line drawn between Calcutta, her present place of stay and Dhaka do not make any sense to her. She comes to realise that borders have a weak existence and not even the history of bloodshed can make them truly impregnable. She is undiplomatic and straight. She says: “But surely there’s something – trenches perhaps, or soldiers, or guns pointing at each other, or even just barren strips of land. Don’t they call it no-man’s–land?” (Lines 151).

Tha’amma questions the deployment of forces in the border quite naively. To her, since it is a no-man’s-land, there is no meaning in fighting against each other. Once in Dhaka, she understands the harsh reality of the border and realises that dislocated people like her have no home in reality but only in memory. Stunned by her nephew Tridib’s death by a riotous mob in Dhaka she develops a great hatred for Pakistanis.

In Location Of Culture, Homi Bhabha writes that “[I]n the postcolonial text the problem of identity returns as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image … is confronted with its difference, its other” (46). The narrative of the Lines dramatises what Bhabha describes as “the otherness of the self” (44), where identity and difference exist not in a relationship of binary opposition but in a state of mutual constructedness. To Bhabha, the very site of national identification is a space of multivocality, contradiction and uncertainty, where identity is not pre-given, stable, or whole, but divided by otherness within itself, always in a state of ambivalence.

Led by the contradiction of uncertainties, Ghosh’s characters suffer from the consciousness of homelessness. In Lines, Ghosh presents the suffering of the self
deprived of ‘home.’ He forces on the idea of homelessness in the lives of the Narrator’s family which has been irrevocably changed as a consequence of Bengal’s partition between India and Pakistan. The narrator, Tridib and Tha’mma suffer a lot because of the shifting of the geographical boundaries. She is very much attached with Dhaka. It is impossible for her to forget Dhaka. The partitioned India and the line drawn between Calcutta, her present place of stay, and Dhaka do not make any sense to her. She is a woman like countless others who experience displacement and dispossession, struggle, and fear. Of Tha’mma, the narrator writes: “I could see that she was going to end up in a hopelessness – She’d not been able to quite understand how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality” (Lines 152). Ghosh is of the view that each person exists and constructs his/her identity in the limited time. The real freedom from such establishments becomes a source of anguish, for no human being can know what will certainly happen to him or her.

Born in Dhaka, Tha’mma has to cross over to India during the turbulent period preceding partition. Later, when she visits Dhaka, she feels that it is an alien country and mourns – ‘But whatever you may say, this isn’t Dhaka” (Lines 195). Even when she is planning her trip to Dhaka, she is plagued by the same paradoxical situation of belonging and not belonging. Sushila Singh in “Double Self in Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines” observes: “The inner and the outer realities contribute to the making of an identity. Amitav Ghosh alternates past and present to place the self in “history” – history that unfolds the fully meaning of the present and an insight into the future” (23).
By delineating Tha’mma, Ghosh depicts all the peculiarities of a middle class woman in distress. She is made up of the substance that goes in producing strong, disciplined children and coherent family. She becomes a widow at the age of thirty two. Afterwards she joins a school to run her family and in complete identification with her job she dedicates her life to the school. Her involvement in her job is complete. The Narrator says:

When she was the headmistress, my grandmother had decided once that every girl who opted for Home Science ought to be taught how to cook at least one dish that was a speciality of some part of the country other than her own. It would be a good way she thought, of teaching them about the diversity and vastness of the country. (Lines 116)

The portrayal of Tha’mma is a tribute to so many unrecognized women, who are holding the world of their children and near and dear ones together, by their toil and labour. Ghosh, in Lines presents the complexities of life of the people, who are forcefully displaced through three different generations.

Tha’mma the representative of the first generation lives in the past, as well as in the present. She serves as the spokesperson of Ghosh in bringing out the haunted past, which she had spent in Dhaka before the partition, and her present life in Calcutta. Ghosh suggests that hers is a moving story of divided self, torn between the past and the present. Widowed at the age of thirty-two, she struggles a lot in her life. She has no time to go to Dhaka in the next few years. “And after 1935 she has no time to go back to
Dhaka. And then in 1947 came partition, and Dhaka became the capital of East Pakistan” (Lines 125).

After the Bengal partition Tha’mma begins to worry about borders. Her son wonders quite innocently, “did she really think the border was a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other, like it was in a school Atlas” (Lines 151). Ghosh contents that the border which makes us outsiders are not physical lines.

Through Tha’mma, Ghosh suggests that nostalgia is an intrinsic part of the life of every outsider which leads to a sense of isolation or alienation and a hankering for the past. It often results in a sense of anguish too. Though Tha’mma lived in Calcutta for about two decades, it is the memory of her childhood that she spent in Dhaka, her relatives in the big joint family that gives meaning and continuity to her life: “In the years that followed, living in Calcutta in a one-room tenement in Bhowanipore, she would often think back on Dhaka, her childhood – all the things people think about when they know that the best parts of their lives are already over” (Lines 125).

Ghosh, in Lines emphasises the absurdity of the “revisionist map making” of the politicians responsible for such segregation. Tha’mma’s self undergoes a sense of alienation. The shadow lines are the borders that divide people. Ghosh emphasises on the arbitrariness of geographical demarcations. Towards the end of the novel, when the members of the family are about to undertake a journey from Calcutta to their former home in Dhaka, Tha’mma asks sarcastically whether she will “be able to see the border between India and East Pakistan from the plane” (Lines 15). All these things unfurl
through the fragmentary stream of consciousness of the narrator in which the private turmoil of the individual is reflected upon the public chaos and crises.

Tha’mma recalls an incident from the freedom struggle. Those days in Bengal there were secret societies like Anushilan and Juganter, organisations of militant nationalists with their clandestine networks and homemade bombs with the purpose of liquidating the British officers and policemen who were symbols of oppression. Fascinated and inspired by the stories of heroism, young women like Tha’amma nurtured ambitions of plunging into the struggle through such secret societies. Their desire to participate fully in the freedom struggle was restricted by two factors – their gender and the secrecy with which these societies functioned.

Tha’mma has always visualised a militant nationalist as a man with fiery looks, with enormous strength and with a huge moustache. Police raids were frequent in the pre independence days. During one such raid, Tha’ammat was shocked, when one of her frail-looking classmates was arrested. The boy had been a member of a secret society from the time he was fourteen years old. She watched in horrified silence as he was hauled away to prison, a mute spectator of historical circumstances. She idolised him for his tremendous mental strength: “It was the shy bearded boy: he was standing now, his face impassive, his back erect, his gaze fixed on the policeman, clear, direct and challenging. He seemed absolutely unmoved … the boy was tried and later deported to the infamous Cellular Goal in the Andaman Island” (*Lines* 37-38).

Ghosh, in *Lines* is of the view that the most traumatic event in the history of modern India is the partition of Bengal, unsurpassed in the magnitude of its effect on
individuals in the sub-continent. The link between history and the individual cannot be depicted more vividly than through the tragic trauma of partition, which is represented in the fiction of Ghosh, for the partition is not just a historical event, but also one that touches the lives of millions of common people throughout the country that is represented by Tha’mma.

The character of Tha’mma reiterates the feeling of being an outsider is reiterated again and again. When she plans her trip to Dhaka, she becomes disturbed by the paradoxical situation of belonging and not belonging. She feels as an alien and a native, simultaneously. In the form to be filled at the airport, she realises that the place of birth will be Dhaka, but her nationality would be filled in as India. The narrator describes: “My father scratched his forehead. Let me see, he said. They want your nationality, your date of birth, that kind of things. My grandmother’s eyes widened and she slumped back in her chair. Nothing, she said, shaking her head. Nothing at all” (Lines 152).

The pitiable condition of any outsider in his/her own country is revealed through Tha’mma. The uprooted self, because of the geographical dislocation, finds it very difficult to adopt within the revised map. Whatever is the reason, the self which is bound to its nativity will feel odd when one become a stranger outwardly and a native inwardly in such circumstances. This troubles Tha’mma “because she liked things to be neat and in place – and at the moment she had not been able to quite understand how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality” (Lines 152).

With her nephew Tridib’s death in the riot between the Hindus and Muslims in Dhaka, Tha’mma finds her idealism fast turning into helplessness. She feels that there “is
a need for an order, a new order, but what kind of order, remains an unanswered question. She lies in bed, weak and helpless” (Lines 49). The loss of Tridib has left a permanent scar in the life of Tha’mma – “She’s already very upset, and it would only get worse if you made her talk about it” (Lines 239).

The narrator while giving an account of Tridib’s life and death analyses and establishes that the political turmoil prevalent during the partition of Bengal has robbed of the personal lives of the innocent people. Tridib is an outsider even among the closest of his relatives. “Tridib was something of a recluse. He was happiest in that book-lined room (Lines 18). He is more interested in using his imagination with precision. Even while sitting in Calcutta, he makes the young narrator, his nephew see the entire world: “Tridib had given me words to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with … to me a boy who had never been more than a few hundred miles from Calcutta” (Lines 20).

Tridib is a student of archaeology with a deep interest in history. His ‘imaginative’ eye can explode all the artificial barriers of time and space. He is the narrator’s idealised hero and a mentor. Tridib’s self, like that of Tha’mma’s, searches for an idealised world. After his death, his search for the ideal world is kept alive by his nephew, the narrator. Through Tridib, Ghosh narrates his passionate dream of an integrated world:

One could never know anything except through desire, real desire, a pure painful and primitive desire, a longing for everything that was not in one’s self a torment of the flesh, that carried one beyond the limits of one’s mind
to another place and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one’s image in the mirror. (*Lines 29*)

This intense longing for ‘a place without any border’ makes Tridib’s self a universal one. Through Tridib, Ghosh conceptualises the idea of universal humanism. Tridib has a congenial hatred for war. To him, war is the major reason for the denigration of human lives. Ghosh, emphasises the need for individual commitment, and is of the view that to gain and retain real freedom, the mind has to first realise the true meaning of responsibility. He vouchsafes: “the realities of the bombs and torpedoes and the dying was easy enough to imagine mere events …. And in all probability they themselves, would not survive the war” (*Lines 67-68*).

During the 1964 communal riots in India and Pakistan, Tridib visits Dhaka with his beloved May and her aunt. While trying to save the lives of his grand uncle and a poor rickshaw driver, he loses his life at the hands of a few fanatics. When the frenzied mob attacks the old man and the rickshaw driver, May first jumps out of the car and rushes towards the victims. Tridib instantly follows her and soon overtakes her. He plunges in the crowd and ‘vanishes’. Later, May finds three dead bodies and Tridib’s is one. She says: “When I got there, I saw three bodies. They were all dead. They’d cut Khalil’s stomach open. The old man’s head had been hacked off. And they’d cut Tridib’s throat, from ear to ear” (*Lines 251*). For years, May carries the guilt of Tridib’s killing. She says: “For years I was arrogant enough to think I owed him his life. But I know now I didn’t kill him. I couldn’t have, if I’d wanted to. He gave himself up: it was
a sacrifice. I can’t understand it, I know I mustn’t try, for any real sacrifice is a mystery” (Lines 251-52).

Ghosh constructs Tridib’s self as a true spirit of individual freedom. It is a human privilege and responsibility to keep one’s spirit of liberation eternally alive in this increasingly hostile world of wars, violence, hatred, frictions and divisions “where there are only states and citizens, there are no people at all” (Lines 233).

Tridib’s inconsequential death, suggests the ignonimity of such hostile fanatic forces which claim to fight for certain social causes. Hatred alienates and dehumanises people. Ghosh aspires that it is time to give up violence and curb further deterioration. Ghosh emphasises, the relevance of the universal self and attempts to give an orderly form to a blind, nihilistic universe. The effort to give a clear, rational expression to the complex idea of freedom results in Tridib’s death. An understanding of the death of Tridib in its essence is a move towards grasping the ideals of the universal self.

Similarly, in Land Ghosh portrays the problem of intolerance and suggests that the acceptance of multiculturalism would clear out the subsequent social maladies. Land is the story of Ben Yiju, a Jewish merchant, originally from Tunisia in Egypt, who came to India around 1130 A.D. “as a trader, and had spent seventeen years there. A man of many accomplishments, a distinguished calligrapher, scholar and poet, Ben Yiju had returned to Egypt having amassed great wealth in India” (Land 19). He marries a Nair woman, acquires an Indian ‘slave’ Bomma, a native of Tulunad and settles in Mangalore with other expatriate Arab traders to overcome the feeling of rootlessness and alienation.
Later, Ben Yiju goes back to Egypt with his slave Bomma. This story is intervened by Amitab the narrator, who is presumably Ghosh himself. Amitab travels to Egypt in 1980 to trace the history of Bomma. During his research work at Oxford, Amitab discovers a letter written by a merchant Khalaf Ibn Is haq to Ben Yiju. This letter has the catalogue number M.S. H.6 of the National and University Library in Jerusalem. This letter leads him “to open a trap door into a vast network of foxholes whose real life continues uninterrupted” (Land 19).

Leela Gandhi, in her essay “In an Antique Land: A View” suggests that “An Antique Land explores the relationship between the grand narratives of history and those barely discernible traces of ordinary people who leave upon the world” (192). Bomma, though a slave is entrusted by his master Ben and leaves his goods worth hundreds of dinars. The bond between Bomma and Ben offers a clue to the nature of the relationship. It is not a master-slave relationship. It is rather that of a patron and a client. The selves of the master and the slave are emotionally bonded. Their selves are beyond the boundaries of ethnicity. Ghosh, through the relationship between Ben and Bomma suggests that even in the twelfth century A.D, there was a good relationship between Egypt and India in the overseas trade. Apart from this, Bomma and Ben share their cultures too. Ghosh infers that Bomma’s acquaintance with “some of the great range of popular traditions and folk beliefs which upturn and invert categories of Sanskrit Hinduism” (Land 263) and Ben Yiju’s sharings of “the beliefs and practices that have always formed the hidden and subversive counter image of the orthodox religions of the Middle East” (Land 263), heighten the graduation of ordinary self into a universal self.
The interesting point to note is that Amitab, the narrator while traveling through the enlightening selves of Bomma and Ben, becomes more enlightened. His peripatetic self becomes more transnational, and he posits himself to convey the need for a universal self.

Many young men migrate from Egypt to Iraq in search of jobs. Nabeel and Ismail, who aspire to settle down in Egypt, leave for Iraq in search of better fortunes. But the joyous days of these Egyptians do not last long. The Iraqis go wild against the Egyptians for snatching away their jobs. Through Ismail, Ghosh writes about the situation.

The Iraqis … they are wild … they come back from the army, for a few days as a time, and they go wild, fighting on the stress, drinking. Egyptians never go out on the streets there at night: if some drunken Iraqis came across you they would kill you, just like that, and nobody would even know, for they’d throw away your papers. It’s happened, happens all the time. They blame as you see, they say: you’ve taken our jobs and our money and grown rich while we’re fighting and dying. (Land 352)

Nabeel and Ismail represent the dilemma and frustration that the youth undergo during the social and political turmoil that had swept the Middle East. The alienated selves of Nabeel and Ismail are further reinforced by the confusion and trauma they face in an alien land. The terror and insecurity experienced by the self create a sense of isolation among the migrated citizens. When the conflict is further intensified by the strife between the Egyptians and the native Iraqis, Ismail decides to return home while Nabeel decides to stay back for some more time. When the narrative ends, Nabeel’s fate
is unknown. “We were crowded around the TV set, watching carefully, minutely, looking at every face we could see. There was nothing to be seen except crowds: Nabeel had vanished into the anonymity of History” (Land 353). Ghosh presents Nabeel as the representative of a generation that has perished in its effort to provide comfort and happiness to families at home. Ghosh is of the view that Nabeel is the personification of all the suffering and agony that the scattered underdeveloped third world countries had to undergo through in their frantic efforts to overcome their poverty and unemployment at home.

Similarly, Khamee’s wife in Land is also presented as a defeated woman. Ghosh presents the plight of the isolated self of women in the Egyptian society. As Khamee’s wife does not bear any child, Khamee decides to marry another woman. His first wife walks off in a rage, shouting at him that it was Khamee’s fault, which is proven in his second marriage. Kanaga Bhagyaveni in “The Image of Woman in Amitav Ghosh’s In an Antique Land, Fiction of the Nineties” comments: “It signifies that it was considered that if a man could not father children, it would only be because of his wife’s fault” (203). Ghosh highlights the silent quest of the self for meaning in life which is unable to withstand the chauvinistic views of the male dominated society.

Khamee’s wife is domesticated and therefore she fails to recognise her basic human worth. Khamee, too, being a chauvinistic, egoist male does not treat his wife even as a fellow human being because she fails to bear children. Khamee accuses his wife for being barren and decides to marry another woman. Ironically, Khamee is impotent and could not bear children through his second wife too.
He had been married off at the age of fifteen, several years ago, and having failed to father any children, he had taken a second wife recently, but with no result. The marriage had caused quite a scandal because his first wife had walked off in a rage, shouting to the world that it was his fault that he was childless, not hers. (*Land* 165)

This incident testifies to the fact that the plight of women in a patriarchal society, even after centuries of hardships and labour, remain the same and the women act only as a subordinate counterparts of a men.

The reaction of Khamee’s first wife has at least proven a fact that she is willing to revolt against her husband. But, Khamee’s second wife is only a faceless being, who does not give vent to anything. She is quite unmindful of what she is and what Khamee means to her in life. By presenting these two subjugated women, Ghosh satirises the patriarchal dominance which makes the male to act as a conqueror of women, and the wives as their mere captives.

Similarly, Rajkumar in *Palace* is an orphan who in search of a job is transported from India to Burma. The rootlessness of Rajkumar in Mandalay in Burma heightens the feeling that he is a stranger. He is afflicted with a sense of insecurity in a totally new atmosphere. Ghosh writes: “His name is Prince, but he was anything but princely in appearance, with his oil-splashed vest, his untidily knotted ‘longyi’ and his bare feet with their thick slippers of calloused skin” (*Palace* 4).

Ghosh conveys that the disturbing predicament of rootlessness and non-belonging urges such voiceless people to move on in search of new pastures and to explore a sense
of belonging. The struggle for liberation and the de-humanising socio-political condition make life of such people miserable.

Rajkumar has a narrow escape from a contagious fever in his native place. The plight of Rajkumar is revealed through his conversation with Mathew –

Mathew said: ‘How did you come to be here in Mandalay’?

‘I was working on a boat, a Sampan, like those you see on the river’.

‘And where are your parents? Your family?

‘I don’t have any’, Rajkumar paused. ‘I lost them’.

‘There was a fever, sickness. In our town, Akyaf, many people died’.

(Palace 12)

The ineffable sense of being an orphan in the native and the foreign soil detaches Rajkumar from all his emotions and finer sentiments in life. He is able to watch every scene with detachment. His only concern is to defend himself from the social atrocities and provide riches for himself. He is a growing boy without strings in life. He takes this negative fact in his stride and makes good use of it. It makes him what he is, practical. “He reserved his trust and affection for those who earned it by concrete example and prevent good will. But that there should exist a universe of loyalties that was unrelated to himself and his own immediate needs – this was very nearly incomprehensible” (Palace 47). The exploring spirit in Rajkumar prompts him to take any type of risk. He works in a stable of a matronly lady Macho. Even though he is an orphan, he is bold. His life long search for people and places begins when he lands in Mandalay in Burma.
Ghosh’s basic concerns are against the drawing of borders and turning of people into refugees. To him, the localised contexts of India and Burma become the sites for self-enquiry and a process of recovering the lost selfhood. Ghosh presents the past not as a dead, remote period, but as flowing on into the present. He takes his position as a secular border intellect. Abdul Jan Mohammed in his essay “Worldliness without World, Homelessness as Home” posits Ghosh as an “intellectual who is located on the outside/margin, and seeks to analyse and understand his society from that position” (441).

Rajkumar’s personal history is entwined with the colonial history and the struggle for existence. Rajkumar, with a strong determinism survives all the odds because of his sheer courage and will power. Finally, he becomes a successful teak and timber merchant in Burma. He struggles to gain a sense of subjectivity, that is, to come to terms with the complex interconnections between economic, political and cultural developments in the colonial world. There are significant transformations within him leading towards survival. Rajkumar who was called as a ‘Kaala’, a recluse is transformed into a honourable ‘babu’ and referred to by the district collector and his wife as “Mr. Raha”.

Rajkumar enters into the teak business, rising up slowly and steadily. His involvement with Saya John, his evil partner, unearths the dark and ruthless world of the woodland. Through the working system of felling teak trees, Ghosh condemns man’s damage done on nature for selfish gains. Earlier, it was the British who plundered the teak forest. But now it is the powerful Indian who indulges in such activities. Rajkumar,
an unethical timber merchant who fells the trees becomes completely absorbed in the capitalistic love for money as an end.

The emergence of Rajkumar from rags to riches is unethical. He, though an orphan and an alien in the foreign soil takes the entire world into his stride. Corruption and fiscal fanaticism have made Rajkumar a colonial victim who climbs the last ladder in the world of corruption. Ghosh emphasises the revenge of the self which was once tortured and dehumanised. Rajkumar’s revenge against the society is borne out of his hatred and helpless starving life in the past. He considers that the society is responsible for his ill being and therefore he bents upon taking revenge against the malignant society. Following the footsteps of the British colonizers, Rajkumar, the neo-capitalist coloniser becomes completely dehumanised. His trade of indentured labour, his dream of Burma as a ‘golden land’ shows his lack of refined human values. He staunchly believes that the coloniser is not only promoting life, but also protecting it in Burma. The self which is insulated by power, exercises it over others, who are weaker than them in terms of power. Through this exposure of complexity of the colonised with the coloniser, Ghosh seems to say that violence is related to power.

During the period of his vengeful atrocities against the hapless labourers, Rajkumar exploits a female worker sexually, and fathers Ilongo, his illegitimate son. Through the conversation between Uma, the collector’s wife and a poor woman, the past of Rajkumar in revealed. Uma asks:

How did it happen? Between you and him?
‘They sent me to him. On the ship, when I was coming over. They called me out of the hold and took me up to his cabin. There was nothing I could do’. 
‘That was the only time?’

‘No. For years afterwards, whenever he was here he’d send for me’.

‘And when was the last time you saw him’.

‘Many years ago. He stopped coming after I told him I was pregnant’.

(*Palace* 236)

Ironically, an orphan breeds another orphan. Rajkumar’s postcolonial consciousness represents a conflict within his own self, a conflict through which he tries to step outside his colonial self, the history of the imperial phase and to approach his past, history and reality from his present position. He engages in the task of colonising land and people for wealth. Rohini Mohashi Punekar in “Repositioning Borders: A Reading of *The Glass Palace*” observes: “The line between the colonizers and the colonized is blurred, even erased: colonisation is seen as a continuous, ongoing process and often reversible” (23).

Despite his achievements, Rajkumar remains, an uneducated orphan. But his life takes a tragic turn, when he is forced to exile from Burma, after the Japanese attack in 1940s: “Approaching Pazundaung, he saw that both sides of the creek were blanketed in flames. While still good distance away he spotted the perimeter walls of his yard. They were shrouded in clouds of smoke” (*Palace* 463). Leaving back his estates in Burma, he has to return to India with other Indians. Consequently, in the formation of Burmese national identity, Indians are termed as hated outsiders. Rajkumar’s long stay at Burma and his marriage to Dolly, a Burmese, do not anyhow give him a Burmese identity. When he comes back to Calcutta, he remains an outsider there, full of empty vanity.
Ghosh’s views on the legendary Aung San Suu Kyi in *Palace* represent his political stand. Ghosh considers that even though she holds no political post, she has become an institution by herself. In 1996, Suu Kyi was house arrested for the sixth time. Despite her release from the confinement, her house is still the centre of the city’s political life: “Twice every week, on Saturdays and Sundays, she held a meeting at her house: People gathered outside and she addressed them from the gate. These meetings had become pilgrimages. A hush fell on Rangoon on weekend afternoons and thousands poured into the city from all round the country” (*Palace* 540).

Ghosh highlights the development of the political self of Aung San Suu Kyi. Suu Kyi, despite all odds faced from the ruling Junta, takes up the freedom struggle in her hands. This self, which is nurtured by the democratic values, makes her greater than ordinary politicians. She succeeds to an extend in taking her struggle to the notice of the international community. Even though, the episode of Suu Kyi is small, Ghosh, while underscoring the importance of survival instinct, depicts her as a symbol of endurance. Suu Kyi, with her enormous resistive power overcomes the hurdles like Alu in *Reason*, for like him, she has nothing to lose:

She is the only one who seems to understand what the place of politics is … What it ought to be … that while misrule and tyranny must be resisted, so too must politics itself… that it cannot be allowed to cannibalise all of life, all of existence …. That politics has invaded every thing, spared nothing … religion, art, family … it has taken over every thing… there is
no escape from it … She understands this … only she … and this is what makes her much greater than a politician. (*Palace 542*)

Through the self of Suu Kyi, Ghosh observes that suffering is a common feature in one’s journey. Sometimes the self attains peace with the accomplishment of the trial. But sometimes it will be hushed up by the atrocities of the establishment. Suu Kyi’s self is one that is undergoing the tortures of the establishment.

On reflecting on the Burmese politics, Ghosh is of the opinion that the Burmese got independence from their British colonisers. Quite paradoxically, after their independence Burma has turned into a military state and has never held elections for years. On this, Ghosh by presenting the case of Suu Kyi, seemingly claims that when a colonised subject gains power, he/she tries to exercise power unethically on the people under their regime. It is quite ironical that a country that has fought for independence has taken a pry to the capitalist imperialism and neo colonialism.

*Chromo* is a science fiction based on the history of the study of the cause of malaria and Ronald Ross’ findings of mosquito as a malarial parasite. It is an attempt to rewrite the story of the British scientist Ronald Ross’s discovery of the life cycle of malaria mosquito to human beings. Here Ghosh demolishes the ancient myth of interdependence between class superiority and the right to knowledge. The main narrative of the novel involves a re-examination of the history of late nineteenth century malaria research by Murugan, an Indian Scientist who works for an international public health company called Life Watch. Murugan has a life long obsession with the history of malaria research. This leads him to the conviction that Ronald Ross, who was awarded
the 1902 Nobel Prize for Medicine for his work on the life cycle of the malaria parasite was not a “lone genius” (*Chromo* 57). Murugan believes there is a secret history that has been erased from the records. He devotes himself to expose the hidden truth.

On World Mosquito Day, 20\textsuperscript{th} August 1995, Murugan arrives in Calcutta. He is in search of the enigmatic Calcutta Chromosome. He prepares an article, “An Alternative Interpretation of Late 19\textsuperscript{th} Century Malaria Research. Is there A Secret History?” Long back when Murugan was in New York, he had written a summary of his research in an article entitled, “Certain Systematic Discrepancies in Ronald Ross’ Account of Plasmodium B. To his shock, Murugan receives a very hostile response from the scientific community. All scientific journals reject the paper. The fact that he doubts Ross’ greatness costs him the membership of Science Society. Murugan is called a crank and an eccentric. He becomes more and more obsessed and erratic. He begins to publicise his ideas about the other mind behind Ross’ discovery.

It becomes clear from Murugan’s account of his research that he has read between the lines on early research on malaria. As a representative of colonial self, Ross has “decided he’s going to rewrite the history books. He wants everyone to know the story like, he’s going to tell it” (*Chromo* 51). But, Murugan’s interpretation does not oblige Ross by accepting his word at face value. Murugan builds up an alternative narrative “most of the connections Ross made came from his servants” (*Chromo* 176).

Through the oriental selves of Murugan and sweeper Mangala, who works in the laboratory of Sir Ronald Ross, Ghosh fictitiously excavates the secret behind the discovery of the malarial parasite. It is the oriental self of Murugan which reveals the
fact that Mangala is responsible for the discovery of malarial parasite through her intuitive knowledge.

Ghosh is of the view that physics and metaphysics co-exist. As far as the discovery of malarial parasite is concerned, the metaphysics in Mangala, in the form of intuitive knowledge is a contributing factor. At this juncture the oriental self of Murugan deals with the possibility of the ‘other mind’. Murugan says:

You know all about matter and anti-matter, right? And rooms and anterooms and Christ and anti-Christ and so on? Now, let’s say there was something like science and counter science? Thinking of it in the abstract, wouldn’t you say that the first principle of a functioning counter science would have to be secrecy?. (Chromo 88)

Murugan’s theory is that some people systematically interfered with Ross’ experiment and pushed malaria research into the right direction. He believes that Ronald Ross has been handed the ‘information on a plate’. It is not his discovery at all. Some one else has planted the idea in him that malarial parasite could be found in one of the species of mosquitoes. Originally, Ross was on a completely wrong track. Even Ross’ mentor Patrick Manson, the noted Scottish bacteriologist who had written a book on filaria was on a wrong track. Both Manson and Ross thought that malarial parasite was transmitted from mosquitoes to human beings orally, probably through drinking water. But almost overnight Ross changed his tract and on August 20th, 1897. Murugan finds it hard to believe that Ross could be successful in such a short span of time. His curiosity and rationality force him to pursue his search of what actually happened and how it
happened. Ghosh goes on to suggest that Ronald Ross had two assistants, Mangala a
sweeper woman and Lutchman, who is ‘Dhooley-bearer’. Murugan says: “It seemed to
me from Farley’s letter that Mangala was actually using the malaria bug as a treatment in
another disease” (Chromo 204).

Before the discovery of penicillin, many believed that there was no cure for
syphilis. But according to Ghosh, there was cure for syphilis, by Mangala, through an
alternative system:

These people who came to see Mangala may have believed that she was a
witch or a magician or a god or whatever it doesn’t matter – the
conventional medical treatments for Syphilis at that time weren’t much
more that hocus-pocus either … If a whole crowd of people believed that
Mangala had a cure, or a half way effective treatment it must have been
because she had a certain rate of success. (Chromo 204)

Murugan gets convinced that there is a conspiracy behind malaria research. He
leaves for Calcutta in search of all missing links, which could enlighten him and the
world about the century old puzzle. His friends and well wishers try to dissuade him, but
Murugan is determined. He reaches Calcutta on 20th August 1995 and the very next day
vanishes: “Subject missing since August 21, 1995” it said, “last seen Calcutta, India”
(Chromo 19).

Ghosh also suggests that an Austrian clinician Julius Von Wagner Jauregg was
actually ahead of Ronald Ross on malaria research. Wagner was working on the clue that
artificially induced malaria could cure or at least mitigate syphilitic paresis. For that he
got the Nobel Prize in 1927. But even before Wagner, that is in the 1890s Mangala the
sweeper woman had achieved remarkable success in this field. Mangala herself suffered
from syphilis, whom Dr. Cunningham had found at Sealdah station and trained her as a
laboratory assistant.

Murugan believes that Mangala is a genius and she has a strong intuition. She is
going in the right direction in malaria research due to her instinctive understanding.
Murugan also guesses that Mangala is using a variation of Wagner process. She has
perhaps noticed that malaria works on paresis through a different route, the brain.
Perhaps that is why primitive people thought of malaria as spirit possession.

Mangala develops a particular kind of malarial bacteria that could be induced in
pigeons. She develops the technique of transferring malaria from a pigeon to a patient of
syphilis. Secretly she starts treating patients in Cunningham’s laboratory. Her treatment
produces strange side effects. The patients often develop weird personality disorders.
These symptoms in the patients are actually ‘randomly assorted personality traits’ which
the patient imbibed from the malaria donor that is, the pigeon:

The woman Mangala was seated at the far end of the room, on a low
divan, but alone and in an attitude of command, as though enthroned …

On the floor by the divan, clustered around the woman’s feet, were some
half dozen people in various attitudes of supplication, some touching her
feet, others lying prostrate. Two or three other were huddled against the
wall, wrapped in blankets … they were syphilitics, in final stages of the
terrible disease. (Chromo 125-26)
Ghosh demolishes the false concept that class superiority and right to knowledge go together. He lays bare the Indian caste system and an assertion of the right of knowledge irrespective of class, caste, creed, culture and colour. Indian team, under the leadership of Mangala achieves remarkable success in this field of research. Wagner follows the treatment of Mangala:

What Wagner – Jauregg showed was that artificially induced malaria often cured, or atleast mitigated Syphilitic paresis. What he’d do is, he’d actually inject malarial blood into the patient by making a little incision. It was pretty crude process, but the weird thing is that it worked. In fact, until antibiotics, the Wagner – Jauregg process was pretty much a standard treatment every major VD hospital had its little incubating room where it grew a flock of anopheles. (Chromo 205)

Ghosh goes into intricate details of medical history to make a credible case of the illiterate Mangala, accomplishing the impossible. In Murugan’s words:

We are talking about a microscopy which was still an artisanal kind of skill at that time. Real talent could take you a long way in it. Unlike Ross she didn’t need to read a zoological study to see that there was a difference between Culex and Anopheles, she’d have seen it like you or I can see the difference between a Dachshund and a Doberman. (Chromo 203)

Ghosh suggests that the repositories of truth and higher knowledge can be a dhooley bearer and a sweeper woman. Madhumalathi Adhikari in “The Continuity of Life, Mission and Mystery in The Calcutta Chromosome” observes: “The author seems
to conform with the Indian Philosophical thought that emphasises the realisation of true knowledge, either through Tarka – analysis and reason or Bhakti – faith and devotion. Ross is the leader of the former method while Mangala and Laakhan are that of the latter” (233).

When Murugan comes to Calcutta in 1995 to find about the malaria story, he discovers an esoteric cult of image worshippers. He comes to know that the image is that of Mangala. One cannot ignore the fact that Mangala is from the very lowest rung of Hindu caste system. Here is a desired reversal of roles. Mangala of the sweeper caste is worshipped in blood and flesh, as well as years after, as an image.

Through the occult self of Mangala, Ghosh brings out the indigenous system of Indian occultism. He is of the view that India has a very deep and long tradition of the occult. In fact, spirits are considered to be as real as the human beings by many people. They are said to exist in a half way between the human world and the world of the “other”. These occults, occupying the lowest rungs in the Hindu hierarchy of the ‘other’ are very close to human state. Ghosh observes that the ‘other’ populate a mental region that has open contacts with the land of the ordinary consciousness.

Ghosh, through the occult self of Mangala deconstructs the western sense of superiority, by Indian occultism. These beliefs may have no scientific basis. But their presence can be easily felt. Since Mangala is the other name of Goddess Kali, Ghosh relates her with the archetypal nurturer as well as the terrible mother figure. By deconstructing the western knowledge, Ghosh, through Mangala endorses intuitive knowledge which is the major reason for the ontogenesis of the oriental self of Mangala.
Significantly, the construction of the occult self which is oriental and of course subaltern gets reflected in Tide. Ghosh in Tide highlights the plight of the subalterns of the Sundarbans in West Bengal. He narrates the subjugated self of the refugees and the natives living in the hostile atmosphere of the Sundarbans. They are subjected to the catastrophic floods, storm, famine, snakes and crocodiles. In this maze of floating islands covered with mangroves, and area fraught with danger, the refugees suffer a lot. The lurking tiger in the jungle and the harmless – looking, but deadly crocodile in the water, and the severe cyclonic storms that cause havoc from time to time, make it unfit for human inhabitation. Yet, the fisher folk lives there and eke out a living from the sea. The waves are treacherous. Ghosh observes: “There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometers inland and every day thousands of acres of forest disappear under water only to re-emerge hours later” (Tide 7).

The living world of folklore is entwined in this novel with the charged political drama of the Morichjhapi massacre in the Sundarbans, an event that happened in the nineteen seventies when thousands of East Bengali refugees who were forcibly resettled in an arid region in Madhya Pradesh fled from there to come and occupy an island in the tide country.

The narrative in Tide centres around two visitors, Kanai Dutt and Piyali Roy, and their interaction with the tide community. Kanai, a Delhi based businessman is a semi-outsider, who pays a visit to his aunt Nilima, an NGO activist who runs a hospital in the
island. Meantime, Piyali Roy an Indo-American scientist also comes to learn about the vanquishing dolphins in the tide country.

These two characters bring out the subjugated self of the inhabitants of the Sundarbans represented by the illiterate native Fokir, who plays the role of their guide. While Ghosh was a young boy, he happened to stay in the Sundarbans with his uncle Sri Chandra Ghosh, who had been for more than a decade a Headmaster in a local school. Even at that young age, Ghosh was able to understand the problems of the refugees.

Ghosh’s curiosity in understanding more about the problems of the natives of Sundarban takes him for a second visit in the ‘tide country’. This peripatetic self of the author correlates with the collective self of the islanders through the subaltern self of Fokir. On his search to know more about the sufferings of the islanders, Ghosh comes across an article entitled “Dwelling in Morichjhapi” by the historian Annu Jalais.

Jalais’ article reveals how the West Bengal Government betrayed the refugees by refusing rehabilitation which was in the Left Front’s election manifesto. The harrowing experiences of neglect and marginalisation bring the islanders and the refugees into a strong tie of solidarity. Jalais says that “they bonded together for a common cause, which was to fight for a niche for themselves” (15).

By referring to this article, Ghosh further narrates the atrocities of the police against the settlers and the natives who are against the eviction. Jalais’ article “Dwelling in Morichjhapi” further reveals:

Thirty police launches circled the island, thereby depriving the settlers of food and water, they were also tear-gassed, then huts razed, their boats
sunk, their fish and tube wells destroyed, those who tried to cross the river were shot at ... several hundred men and women and children were believed to have died during that time and their bodies thrown in river. (15)

Even though the settlers and the natives are somewhat able to withstand the fury of nature, they are unable to fight against the police atrocities. In this regard, Ghosh is of the view that the collective colonised self is unable to resist the colonial self of the government. “They tried to break their collective strength by offering bribes. But when it failed, they resorted to threats of physical violence as their next strategy” (Tide 223).

Ghosh, through Nirmal in Tide represents the progressive self. Nirmal, the retired Headmaster of a local school is an activist. He is behind the unification of the people of the island. Braving thirst and hunger, and brushing aside the threats of police violence Nirmal fights for the cause of the islanders. Nirmal’s commitment towards the cause of the refugees displays his fighting spirit to find a permanent place for the refugees. The collective self of the islanders receives the first beating when the soldiers come in boats and dinghies and “burnt the settlers huts and sank their boats and land waste to their fields” (Tide 279).

Nirmal believes in the dictum that life is lived in revolution and transformation. When there is a problem for the refugees in Sundarbans, he identifies himself with the dispossessed people. He wishes to create a society without any divisions. Therefore, for him, home is a place where the revolutionaries are. And that home could be anywhere in the world. Nirmal’s quest for identity is obtained by his identification with the settlers of
the island. He shares the struggle for existence of the islanders. His fight for the well-being of the islanders instills an inquisitive search for his own identity.

The collective self of the islanders is further shattered when the women are raped and thrown into the rivers and dozens of settlers are killed by the police. Eventually, Nirmal is found stranded and unconscious in a nearby village Canning. Along with the people of Morichjhapi, he is also herded off to be transported in trucks. But when his identity as the retired Headmaster is revealed, he is let off: “He was put on, in a bus with other refugees. They were to be sent back to the place they had come from – in Madhya Pradesh, or wherever it was. But at some point they must have let him off because he found his way back to Canning” (Tide 279).

Eventually, unable to withstand the trauma of the physical and mental defeat, Nirmal dies. Through Nirmal, Ghosh mirrors the sufferings of a progressive self at the hands of the establishments. The spirit of liberation is portrayed through the progressive self of Nirmal. Ghosh being a Marxist, identifies himself with the leftist intellectual Nirmal.

Nirmal has the benefits of a Western education, but is irresistibly drawn to local causes. He is an embodiment of the romantic idealist in whom the poet and revolutionary co-exist. The Chilean poet Rike and the revolutionary socialist Marx attract him equally. His self, which represents the sufferings of the islanders is nurtured by the progressive thought. The revolution at Morichjhapi is unable to withstand the combined forces of local and global reality. Nirmal’s unsuccessful attempt in translating idealism into reality
is an example for the shattering of a progressive self because of the high handedness of the colonial self.

Nirmal’s self chases a romantic ideal across the margin of history which finally collapses in the illusory space between what the Bangladeshi refugees claim as home and what render them ‘homeless’. Nirmal’s idea of ‘home’ is a rehabilitated place where all live in harmony. But in spite of his fight with the government, he is unable to secure a ‘home’ for the ‘homeless’ in the tide country.

Nirmal, who has involved himself in the noble act of uplifting the living condition of the settlers, asks a question central to the novel’s concern: “Whose is the land, nature’s or man’s, is a question that cannot be easily answered. The questions like “who, indeed are we?” and “where do we belong”? (Tide 254), raised by the refugees, who refuse to budge, but shout in unison on the onrushing police, portray the inner turmoil and the anguish of the millions without a home. Nirmal identifying himself with the refugees responds to the questions – “We are the dispossessed” (Tide 254).

The longer Nirmal listens, the more he is shot with the arrows of the questions from within himself: “And as I listened to the sound of those syllables, it was as if I were hearing the deepest uncertainties of my heart being spoken to the rivers and the tides. “Who was I? Where did I belong? In Kolkatta or in the tide country? In India or across the border? In prose or in poetry” (Tide 254).

In the words of the postmodern critic Sukanta Das in “Towards an Alternative Identity: Amitav Ghosh’s The Hungry Tide”, “the essentialist notion of identity blurs the vital internal difference among the component parts of any identity” (107). In short, the
postmodern notion of identity stresses the fact that identity is relative, arbitrary and fleeting.

Ghosh depicts the tortured self of Piya, who has a soft corner for the illiterate Fokir. Moyna, Fokir’s wife, becomes suspicious of Piya and Fokir’s mutual attraction. Moyna makes the monetary transactions with Piya. Piya tells Moyna through Kanai that she will pay:

The expedition would last a few days – may be four or five, depending on what they found. She would pay all expenses of course – the rent of the boat, the provisions and all that and she would also pay Fokir a salary plus a per diem. On top of that, if all went well there’d be a bonus at the end: all told, he would stand to make about three hundred US dollars. (Tide 210)

Moyna is overjoyed at the large sum of money, still she feels the unvoiced call between her husband Fokir and Piya. She asks point blank: “Why a highly educated scientist like you needs the help of my husband – someone who doesn’t even know how to read and write” (Tide 211). When Kanai translates the question to Piya, she “frowned, puzzling over this. Could Moyna really be as dismissive of her husband as her question seemed to imply? Or was she trying to suggest that Piya should hire some one else?” (Tide 211). But Piya finally decides that “there was no one else she wanted to work with and tries to pacify Moyna by saying, through Kanai, that Fokir “knows the river well. His knowledge can be of help to a scientist like myself. (Tide 211).
During the expedition on the big motor boat, *Megha*, silent but hostile cross-currents of tension spark between Kanai and Piya. Kanai, to whom, so far women have been merely substances for amorous dalliances, realises his true feelings for Piya. He gives her marriage proposal. Piya, though greatly surprised gently says, “I’m sure one day you’ll meet the woman who’s right for you. But I don’t think I’m the one” (*Tide* 335).

Kanai, rebuffed in love, decides to go back to Delhi immediately, and starts for Lucibari, in the middle of the expedition. Piya goes to Garjontola in Fokir’s little boat, and it is agreed that *Megha* will come the next day to fetch them from Garjontola. But a big cyclone breaks out early next morning, and Piya and Fokir together are unable to row fast enough to reach *Megha* through the flooded country side. They have to take shelter on a tree top. There, Fokir is hit severely on his back by a big stump of a tree and dies while shielding Piya with his own body. Piya becomes numb with shock. She tells Moyna later on that in his last breath, Fokir uttered the names of Moyna and his son Tutul only. Moyna realises, too late, that her suspicions have been baseless. Her beloved husband had remained faithful to her till his end, he never let Piya substitute Moyna. Kanai also grows calm knowing that Piya’s feelings for Fokir had gone unreciprocated. Ultimately, both Piya and Kanai remain victims of unrequited love.

Piya leaves Lucibari a few days after Fokir’s death and goes to Kolkata to update the documents regarding an American citizen staying and working in India. She returns within a month, flogged on by her decision to carry on her research. She talks to Nilima
at length about her intended research project, and announces that she would like to “name it after Fokir, since his data is going to be crucial to this project” (Tide 398).

Ghosh endorses that the state of homelessness, of being in a cultural void, is a source of determination. The hidden motif of ‘home’ negotiates its way through numerous treacherous experiences, thus making the self aware of the harsh realities of day to day life. A fine distinction between the statements made by Piya and Nilima – “home is where the Oracellas are, home is wherever I can brew a pot of good tea”, (Tide 250) outlines a hidden presence of homelessness.

Nilima is enterprising and can do anything to secure the space, to which she belongs to. She lives her dreams and innate desires, lending them her vivid presence. She is entirely rooted in her socio-cultural milieu. It is this humane nature of her self which prompts her to work for the refugees as a doctor in the ‘tide country’. Her self is the bondage between her and her dedication towards the social progress of her community.

Through Nilimia, Ghosh insists on the need of help and security for the needy. When Nilima arrives at Lusibari, she notices that a large proportion of the island’s women are dressed as widows:

Making inquires she learnt that in the tide country girls were brought up on the assumption that if they married, they would be widowed in their twenties-their thirties if they were lucky. This assumption was woven, like a skein of dark wool, into the fabric of their lives: When the men folk went fishing it was the custom for their wives to change into the garments of
widowhood. They will put away their marital reds … wash the vermilion from their heads. *(Tide 80)*

This incident makes Nilima to do something for the islanders. She dedicates her life for the natives of the Sundarbans. Had she served in Calcutta or somewhere else she would have been more safe and comfortable. But her love for the people of the ‘tide country’ makes her work in the hostile hinterland. Her self, which is an amalgamation of love, affection and amity, gives her a motherly image. Ghosh through this character makes us aware of charity and humility which is the need of the hour. P. Shailaja and G. Manoga in “Equality and Differences: A Reading of Amitav Ghosh’s Women” says that “This concept of self as potentially unified with a place and an aspiration for psychic unity with the needy becomes her hub” (10).

Besides her benevolence Nilima’s self stands for courage, honour, hope compassion and sacrifice. Nilima belongs to an elite family with good educational background. Ghosh, through Nilima says that the empowering elite section is in the process of converting the traditional past to modernity that percolated as a new sensibility about women’s duties and responsibilities. When Nilima suggests that “I am not capable of dealing with the whole world’s problem. For me a challenge of making a few little things a little better in one small place is enough. That place for me is Lusibari” *(Tide 387)*. Ghosh upholds the value of humanism and highlights the need of servitude for the needy in a complex world full of chaos and confusion.

In this context, the ontological development of Kanai Dutt, the Delhi businessman and Piyali Roy the Indo-American scientist in *Tide* is significant. Kanai and Piyali are
the representatives of the elites who are unaware of the problems of the marginalised in such a hostile hinterland. Kanai, who has come to meet his aunt Nilima, and Piyali who has come to study about the dolphins in Sundarbans, incidentally are involved in the shattered life of the natives. Kanai and Piyali are able to identify with the underprivileged of the tide community. Their travel around the world and wisdom make them sympathise with the shattered people of the island. In addition to it, Ghosh incorporates the story of the revolutionary activist Nirmal, who sacrifices his life for refugees.

Ghosh’s identification with the marginalized people is quite evident in his recent work *Poppies*. Through the character Deeti in *Poppies*, Ghosh voices against the subjugation of the marginalised self. Ghosh projects how the superstitious beliefs damage the life of women in a caste-ridden society. Deeti a rustic Gangetic woman believes that nobody will marry her since “she is bedeviled by her stars, her fate being ruled by Saturn – *Shani* – a planet that exercised great power on those born under its influence, often bringing discord, unhappiness and disharmony” (*Poppies* 30). Ghosh condemns the practice that such girls are married away to some old men “who needed a wife to nurse his brood” (*Poppies* 31). This happens in the life of Deeti. She is married to an old man named Hukam Singh, an opium planter and addict.

Deeti is also forced to carry the badge of humiliation and contempt. Ghosh identifies Deeti with a hapless woman, whose right to enjoy the life is denied. Deeti is unable to challenge the patriarchal ideology of the society. One day he forces her to take opium. Later, as a result of the conjugal bliss she becomes pregnant. But she is
flabbergasted to know that the father of the child is her husband’s brother, Chandan Singh.

When Deeti lies under the influence of opium, it is not her husband, but Chandan Singh who shares the bed with her. Deeti’s mother-in-law compares Deeti with Draupati, the wife of Pandavas. “It’s a fortunate woman, a ‘saubhagyawati’ who bears the children of brother for each other …” (Poppies 39). Deeti is subjugated to torments and her mother-in-law justifies it by quoting from Mahabaratha. “It was this allusion that confirmed Deeti’s belief that the child in her belly had been fathered not by her husband, but by Chandan Singh, her leering, slack-jawed brother-in-law’ (Poppies 39).

Myths and rituals come to the rescue of the victimisers so as to subjugate the helpless one in the name of religion. Ghosh foregrounds the religious beliefs which are convenient for men, to colonise women’s body. Deeti symbolises the marginalised self. Through the marginalised self of Deeti, Ghosh exposes the notion of gender discrimination in our society. Ghosh further claims that the sexuality of a woman is not at her will and it is taken for granted. Subsequently the ugly root of male chauvinism is violently imposed on her.

When Deeti’s husband is bed ridden, Chandan Singh frequents her house in the pretext of seeing his brother:

After this on the pretext of visiting his brother, Chandan Singh took to invading her home with increasing frequency. Although he had never shown any interest in Hukam Singh’s conditions, he now began to insist on his right to enter the house in order to sit beside his brother’s bed. But
once past the door, he paid no attention to his brother and had eyes only for Deeti: even as he was entering he would brush his hand against her thigh. (*Poppies* 156-57)

Ghosh is of the view that in our society, this is the condition of such hapless women. Women, according to Ghosh, are very often treated as a rightful possession of the men folk. Through Deeti, Ghosh highlights the vulnerable condition of such women who are the victims of such domestic violence.

Ghosh argues that there is a limit for such humiliation. When the sexual torture of Chandan Singh goes beyond limits Deeti grows courageous out of frustration. One day, Chandan Singh makes an awkward advance. “Sitting on his brother’s bed, he would look at her and fondle himself through the folds of his dothi; when Deeti knelt to feed Hukam Singh, he would lean so close as to brush her breasts with his knees and elbows” (*Poppies* 157). When his advances become so aggressive, Deeti took to hiding a knife in the fold of her sari.

Ghosh, through this incident highlights the boldness of Deeti, who decides to fight against the humiliation. The culmination of her boldness manifests when Chandan Singh tries to rape her. She becomes more aggressive. Following her instincts, “she dug her elbow into his bony chest and pushed him aside… what kind of devil, she said, can speak like this in front of his own dying brother? Listen to my words: I will burn on my husband’s pyre rather than give myself to you” (*Poppies* 158).

Ghosh through this incident voices the plight of women who face such domestic encounters. It is such indoor problems that make the situation more pathetic. When the
danger comes from the person who has to protect her, she feels completely desolated and destitute. Like any other woman, Deeti thinks of seeking refuge by committing suicide by performing sati. It is pathetic to note that such incidents are a day to day routine. Deeti very well knows that her daughter Kabutri will not be given due respect in her household because of Chandan Singh’s ire towards Deeti for revolting against his advances. This looming danger from Chandan Singh makes Deeti feel unsafe. She is more worried about her daughter. Deeti decides to leave her daughter with her brother Havildar Kesri Singh.

Deeti’s sad plight because of the sexual advances of Chandan Singh, is now further shattered when she is forced to part with her daughter. “It is possible for Deeti to remain dry-eyed and composed as she tied Kabutri’s scant few pieces of clothing in a bundle” (Poppies 159). The separation is more than to endure for the mother in Deeti. But she has no other way. “When the boat sailed away, with Kabutri in it, it was as if Deeti’s last connection with life had been severed. From that moment she knew no further hesitation: with her habitual care, she set about making plans for her own end” (Poppies 159).

Meanwhile, Deeti’s husband dies and she is forced to jump into the pyre and perform sati. Deeti, who is unable to withstand this male chauvinistic attitude, gets ready to jump into the fire. Kalua, a so called outcaste, who feels pity for Deeti, follows the funeral procession. Kalua is shocked to see Deeti clad in a white sari: “Following close behind was a second procession, and upon its entry into the clearing, Kalua saw that
it was headed by Deeti, in a replented white sari” (*Poppies* 169). Deeply moved by the pitiable condition of Deeti, Kalua decides to rescue her:

Racing to the mound, Kalua placed the platform against the fire, scrambled on the top and snatched Deeti from the flames. With her inert body slung over his shoulder, he jumped back to the ground and ran towards the river …. On reaching the water, he placed Deeti upon it. Then pushing free of the shore, he thrust himself on the improvised raft. (*Poppies* 177)

Deeti is not aware of what is happening to her. Since she is very tired and almost in a trance, she thinks that she is carried away by some unknown force. While lying in the boat, she comes to know that it is Kalua, who is rowing the boat. With this unexpected escapade, a transformation takes place in Deeti’s self. She feels that she is reborn:

A curious feeling, of joy mixed with resignation, crept into her heart, for it was as if really she died and been delivered betimes in rebirth, to her next life; she had shed the body of the old Deeti, with the burden of its karma… and was free now to create a new destiny as she willed, with whom she chose – and she knew that it was with Kalua that this life would be lived. (*Poppies* 178)

Ghosh, creates a new destiny for Deeti. The self of Deeti is freed from apprehensions. The self, once humiliated by the male chauvinistic and superstitious beliefs of her own people is now under the safe hands of Kalua. Ghosh explodes the
myth of such rituals and asserts that caste and creed are in no way a hindrance for a life
where human values and respect are the prime concern.

Before going to some city for livelihood as decided earlier, Deeti decides to meet
Kabutri. Deeti is unable to go to her brother’s house because of the stigma attached
with her for being with an outcaste: “She knew that a meeting with Kabutri would be, at
best, a stolen encounter, requiring much stealth and patience” (*Poppies* 195).

The self of Deeti is very much haunted because of her longing to see her daughter.
After many trials and tribulations, she meets her daughter one night on the river bank
near Kesri Singh’s house. Deeti discloses her escapade with Kalua to her daughter.
Deeti says: “My escape was Kalua’s doing…. It was he who saved me” (*Poppies* 195).
Deeti does not know how Kabutri will take her escapade with Kalua. Her self further
undergoes turmoil. But Kabutri praises Kalua for saving Deeti:

Kalua saved you?

Was it outrage or disbelief that she heard in Kabutri’s voice? Already prey
to many kinds of guilt, Deeti began to tremble, in anticipation of her
daughter’s on her flight with Kalua. But when the girl continued, it was in
a tone, not of anger, but of eager curiosity. Is he with you now? Where
will you go? (*Poppies* 195)

When Deeti says that she is going to the city, Kabutri also expresses her
willingness to accompany her: “a city! Kabutri flung a beseeching arm around Deeti’s
waist. I want to go too; take me with you to a city” (*Poppies* 195). For this Deeti replies:
“To wander all your life? Like me?” (*Poppies* 195).
Ghosh through this event reflects the helpless self of Deeti and the longing self of Kabutri. Since Deeti’s life is at risk for accompanying Kalua, she finds is difficult to accommodate her daughter and thinks that Kabutri will be in the safe hands of her relatives: “No. Deeti shook her head; no matter how fiercely her heart longed to take her daughter along, she knew she must resist: She had no idea of where her next meal would come from, far less where she might be next week or next month. At least with her aunt and her cousins the girl would be looked after” (*Poppies* 195).

Deeti’s identity suffers when she thinks that whether Kabutri may feel that Deeti is avoiding her. This makes Deeti more embarrassed. Deeti tries to overcome her embarrassment by saying:

> Until the time is right, Kabutri – and when it is I will be back for you. Do you think that I don’t want you with me? Do you think so? Do you know what it will mean for me to leave you here? Do you know Kabutri? Do you know? Kabutri fell silent and when she spoke again, it was to say something that Deeti would never forget.

> And when you come back, will you bring me bangles? (*Poppies* 200)

Meantime, Deeti and Kalua are told by the opium merchants that they will be employed as coolies in the ship *Ibis*, at Calcutta port, which transports opium by the East India Company to various places. They are asked to board a boat in the Ganges to go to the port, along with other coolies.

Since the news of Deeti’s escapade with Kalua spreads everywhere, she changes her name as Aditi. “Her proper, given name was the first to come to mind, and since it
had never been used by anyone, it was s good as any. Aditi, she said softly, I am Aditi” (Poppies 233). Meanwhile Kalua, who is working as an oarsman in the boat changes his name as Madhu. Actually Madhu is his father’s name. When Kalua and Deeti enter into the ship, the gomasta asks Kalua’s father’s name. “The question flummoxed Kalua: having stolen his father’s name for his own, the only expedient he could think of was to make a switch: His name was Kalua Malik” (Poppies 284).

It is significant to note the change of names of Kalua and Deeti. Name is a part of one’s identity. The association of one’s name with oneself is intrinsic. Deeti and Kalua are forced to change their names, which in a way makes them feel that they are alienated from the mainstream and also are strangers.

The sea voyage is full of hardships for the coolies. The captain Chillingworth, and other officers ill treat the collies. Deeti, after becoming more courageous because of the hardships undergone, one day revolts against the officers for not giving due respect to the dead body of a young coppersmith, who died in the ship. The officers’ aim is to throw the dead body into the sea without paying any last rites:

The deceased was a young Muslim julaha from Pirpainti, who was travelling with two cousins. The dead weaver’s companions were even younger than he, and neither of them was in a state to protest when a squad of silahdars came down to the dabusa and ordered them to heave the body up so that it could be tipped overboard. (Poppies 414)

When the officers command the two boys to throw the dead body into the sea, Deeti, unable to bear the inhuman attitude, revolts against the officers. “Wait!” She told
the two boys. “This isn’t right” (*Poppies* 414). Subsequently, because of her argument, the officers decide to pay due respect to the dead body by cleaning it and doing the last rites. To Deeti, it is a victory for her fight against the masters. It is evident that she has metamorphosed from an innocent ill fated woman to a woman who fights for others. Born in an orthodox family, Deeti is exposed to the world of harsh realities because of her escapade with Kalua. Right from the beginning she faces lot of trials and tribulations. Even in her husbands house, she is not safe. But the harrowing experiences in her life make her bold and courageous.

Deeti transcends caste, gender and religious predicaments. She constructs her identity by traversing through the strictures of caste, gender and religion, so as to detach her from the clutches of social discrimination. Here one can see the rebel in Deeti coming to the fore. Because of the insult meted to the coppersmith’s dead body, her outrage is spontaneous. Ghosh, through this incident brings into limelight the sudden unleash of emotions in Deeti. Right from the beginning she has been a mute spectator for all the ills done towards her. Like any other hapless woman, she also bears the brunt of the male chauvinistic society. This incident serves as a major breakthrough in Deeti’s self, attaining ontological development. Here the ontological development comes a full circle, when Deeti champions for the right of the fellow mariners. This is possible because of the free will in Deeti. Freed from the clutches of the past, she is not dictated by the orthodox norms and superstitious beliefs. She is out of confinement. Her identity is based on a profound and broad sense of goodwill. Her free will transcends to the position of the
citizen of the world. All this is capable because of her rejection of the orthodoxy and her will to leave with Kalua by brandishing the caste factor.

From a rustic innocent woman, Deeti emerges as a woman of free will asserting her individuality. Once a victim of patriarchal culture, she escapes from death perchance. At present, having experienced all the hardships in life, Deeti transforms herself from a mute spectator to an active participant. Her concern for the dead sailor and her revolt against the captain of the ship lay bare her newly found social commitment and empathy for fellow human beings. Even though Deeti and Kalua are not married, they live as husband and wife. Since mutual trust is the governing factor, the social institution of marriage has no significance.

To sum up, Ghosh portrays his characters as life givers and sustainers. He develops characters who are finally strong, can express themselves, do things, travel, come to their own decisions and live independently. His protagonists pursue ideals, which they as individuals value. They are symbols of growth, progress and forward movement. In them, one can find a fusion of psychological and sociological trauma. Nevertheless, they endure and accept the crises as a part of their life. Even though they play a small part on their own terms, they are like ordinary people who struggle for their existence in a moderate way. In addition, Ghosh’s major characters get rid of their dependency needs, break the pattern of sexuality and sensuality and take their place as whole human beings. Ghosh believes that human perception, comprehension and experience shape one’s self and the question of identity is always implicated in the representation of the self and of the world around it. For, identity does not stand alone
nor is it derived from some inborn essence, but fashioned by experience and representation.

Experience and representation of the self provides a critical overview of the construction of individual identity and results in collective sociological formations such as history, race and culture. In this context, history, an account of collective selves is often tends to be subjective and person oriented. The research in the succeeding chapter tries to establish that Amitav Ghosh, being a new historicist posits himself on the periphery to write not about the victors, but the vanquished.