Chapter - IV

Multiculturalism and Universal Humanism

Cultural Studies, is an entity which straddles the intellectual and academic landscape of old established disciplines and new political movements and intellectual practices. It is concerned with diverse and intellectual endeavours that address numerous questions related to human development, individual freedom, human rights and universal brotherhood. Therefore, Cultural Studies aims to be both an intellectual and a pragmatic enterprise. Its objective is to understand culture in all its complex forms and to analyse the social and political contexts within which it manifests itself.

Cultural Studies believes that the culture of a community includes various aspects such as economic, spatial, ideological, erotic and political. Cultural Studies aims to include all these within its ambit. Cultural Studies adapts methods of analysis from various disciplines such as media studies, cultural anthropology, discourse analysis, popular culture and audience studies. Cultural Studies asserts that cultural artifacts cannot be read within the aesthetic realm alone. A work of art must be analysed not only within its generic conventions and history, but also in terms of the academic field of literary criticism. This academic field of literary criticism paves a way for exploring the political significance of Cultural Studies. It thus deals with the studies of language in and through which meanings are made in a particular culture. In the process, it questions how such meanings reflect the power struggle within that culture and explores new meanings that are privileged in that culture.
The work of Raymond Williams, the famous twentieth century Marxist critic, influenced the projects and approaches of the pioneering organisation of Cultural Studies – the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCS), in 1964. The approach was clearly Marxist, and it adapted Marxist theoretical insights into Cultural Studies. The main features of the Birmingham approach to cultural studies are (a), it is interdisciplinary (b) it stresses a broad definition of culture (c) it rejects high / low distinction and treats all cultural expressions as legitimate, and (d) it envisages the cultural totality of a society in terms of both the cultural artifacts such as texts, films, art products etc, and the practices and processes of production, distribution and reception.

Meanwhile, Stuart Hall’s essay, “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms” sets the tone for the interrogation of the study of culture. Hall suggests that “Subjects were not constitutive and culturally expressive. Subjects and expression are both determined by structures of social signification. This structure is hegemony, the ideological structure that enables the dominant class to legitimise, naturalise and retain power” (58).

Cultural identity is not an immutable fate determined by a limited number of factors. German minister of Arts, Frank – Walter Steinmeier in his inaugural address at the Frankfurt Book Fair says, “the reduction of cultural identity to one or two dimensions is prejudicial to people’s free choice and search for their own identity”(8). Amartya Sen, the Indian social philosopher and economist, once called this reduction of identity as the miniaturisation of human beings. Anyone who defines identity as a static quality reduces cultural memory and ignores people’s curiosity, imagination and desire for change.
Inevitably cultural options should be broadened which, in turn would enhance the identity – giving strength of a society. This can be achieved by altering our perspectives and combining introspection with extroversion, the familiar with the unfamiliar and striving hard for a society, with a strong foundation of multiculturalism.

The term ‘multiculturalism’ generally refers to a state of racial, cultural and ethnic diversity within the demographics of a specified place. Multiculturalism aims at recognising, celebrating and maintaining the different cultures or cultural identities within that society to promote social cohesion. In this context, multiculturalism advocates a society that extends equitable status to distinct cultural and religious groups, with no one culture predominating.

As a philosophy, multiculturalism began as a part of the Pragmatism Movement at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe and in the United States, and then as political and cultural pluralism at the turn of the twentieth century. Multiculturalism was partly in response to a new wave of European imperialism in sub Saharan Africa and the massive immigration of Southern and Eastern Europeans to the United States and Latin America. Philosophers, psychologists, historians and early sociologists such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, George Santayana, Horace Kallen, John Dewey, W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke developed concepts of cultural pluralism, from which emerges multiculturalism. William James in *Pluralistic Universe* espouses the idea of a plural society. James sees pluralism as “crucial to the formation of philosophical and social humanism to help build a better, more egalitarian society” (20).
In the 19th century, the ideology of nationalism transformed the way Europeans thought about the state. Existing states were broken up and new ones were created. The new nation states were founded on the principle that each nation is entitled to its own sovereign state and to engender, protect, and preserve its own unique culture and history. Unity, under this ideology, is seen as an essential feature of unity of culture, unity of language, and often as unity of religion. The nation-state constitutes a culturally homogeneous society, although some national movements recognised regional differences. None, however, accepted foreign elements in culture and society. Multilingual and multi-ethnic empires, such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire, were considered oppressive, and most Europeans did not accept that such a multicultural state could be legitimate.

Multiculturalism points to the visible and universally accessible products of cultural diversity – food, clothes, music, theatre, etc. and on the whole has a very positive resonance. It is the need of the hour to uphold multiculturalism which adds to the variety and colour of lifestyles, thus increasing the breadth of our choices as human beings.

Multiculturalism is a never-ending process of coming to terms with the major question of life and humanity. That is why, in an age of even closer intercultural contacts, cultural cooperation, cultural exchange and joint discussion on cultural matters are indispensably important.

The value of Cultural Studies in the academics today can easily be understood by the fact that numerous writings concerning Cultural Studies across disciplinary boundaries have been published and research centres and degree programmes have been
initiated for its promotion. The fact that a number of journals such as *The Representation, The Social Text Signs, Cultural Critique* and *Discourse* are dedicated to the promotion of Cultural Studies signifies that this inter-disciplinary project has come to stay. As cultural critic Ben Agger remarks in *Cultural Studies as Critical Theory* “[Cultural Studies] is an important trend in scholarship that will probably leave its mark for many years to come” (1). Cultural Studies is a holistic approach and an attempt to surmount the practice of studying culture in fragments within the disciplinary limits of anthropology, sociology, history and literary theory.

Marxist critic Raymond Williams in his essay ‘Marxism and Literature’ aptly observes that “Culture became a noun of ‘inner’ process, specialised to its presumed, agencies in intellectual life’ and the ‘arts’ and the ‘humanities’, from the first sense. It played an equally crucial role in definitions of ‘human science’ in the second sense” (17).

J.N. Patnaik avers in “The Premises of Cultural Studies” that the “democratization of social institutions as well as growing awareness of freedom and human rights has led to a revisionary version of culture that eschews all normative and evaluative concerns and reconstitutes itself descriptively” (2).

One major feature of Ghosh’s writings is his concern for global humanism coming to grip with the realisation that multiculturalism cannot be geopolitically defined or delimited. Robert Dixon remarks in his essay “Travelling in the West: The Writings of Amitav Ghosh” that “the cultural space that Ghosh re-situates is a vast, borderless region with its own hybrid languages and practices which circulate without national or religious boundaries” (4). In this context, Amitav Ghosh highlights the awareness of growing
internationalisation of the world. He shows the coming together of different societies and cultures, which has also emphasised their distinctions. To build a society on the basis of multiculturalism, one should divest oneself of the narrow-mindedness of selfishness.

In *Reason*, Ghosh attempts to awaken the masses along rational lines and for him rationality alone can be a catalyst for a multicultural society with universal humanism as the end product. Such entities can be achieved only when there is a scientific approach to life and through social change, universal humanism can be achieved. Social change is possible only when the mass of the people realise and reap the benefits that flow from the realms of scientific thought. Through Gopal, in *Reason* Ghosh conveys that “reason discovers itself through events and people” (*Reason* 36). Ghosh says that rationality alone can help in attaining the ideal of multiculturalism. To propagate this idea, Gopal and his friends start the Rationalist Society. The difference between the Science Association and their society is that they not only consider the science pursued in the laboratory, but also the application of scientific principles of rationality to every aspect of human life. The idea of universal humanism is reiterated when Gopal says that “wasn’t the Rationalists’ motto ‘Reason rescues man from Barbarity’”? (*Reason* 46). According to Ghosh, the aim of the rationalists is to apply the principles of rationality to every aspect of human life. The application of scientific principles to their own lives, to society, to religion and to history is their sole purpose. This argument of the rationalists develops them into a unique organisation.

In an era of religious parochialism and communal hatred, which are major threats for multiculturalism, Ghosh is of the view that it is the crookedness of some religious
leaders and organisations that makes the situation dangerous. The rationalist in Ghosh argues:

There were certain curious parallelisms between the ideas of the ancient Hindu sages and modern science. If that was true, and many very learned authorities believed it to be so, then it was a definite proof that over the centuries those ancient and completely rational ideas had been perverted by scheming priest and Brahmans to further their own interests. It was urgently necessary, therefore, that the society make known to the masses of Hindoostan, how they were daily deceived and cheated by the self-styled purveyors of religion. (*Reason* 46-47)

Ghosh here identifies the problem of religious fundamentalism, which is a major hurdle in the path of multiculturalism. According to him, it is the self-styled purveyors of religion, who exploit the credulity of the people and cheat them of their rightful earnings and rob them of their human rights. They degrade themselves to the level of opening independent political and commercial outlets for each God, thereby denigrating the very concept of religion. Ghosh is vehement in his attack against religious parochialism when he says,

For example, it was certain that the pandits and Brahmans had distorted the ancient Hindu idea of God, the Brahma, into their thousands of deities and idols – so that they could make money quicker. Just as a shopkeeper might open new counters, so each new God was a steady new source of income for the priest. As for real Brahma, he was without attributes,
without form, nothing but an essence, in everything and in nothing.

(Reason 47)

Ghosh observes that there must be a harmonious blend between religious culture and scientific culture in their true senses. Only then there can be a vibrant society devoid of all types of fundamentalism and fanaticism could be eradicated. To reiterate this idea of multiculturalism and universal humanism, Ghosh, through Gopal says that “the Brahma is nothing but the Atom (Reason 47). To Ghosh, science and religion must co-exist because “the Universal Egg of Hindu mythology is nothing but a kind of Cosmic Neutron” (Reason 47). Gopal further says: “If we are to disseminate the truth we must begin here, in our own society. I propose, therefore, that we begin all our meetings hereafter with salutations and prayers to the Cosmic Atom” (Reason 47).

Ghosh consolidates his view on the need for the coming together of the principles of religion and science by saying that one must try to understand the underlying principles and discourse of religion. One should find the hidden parallels in religion and science. The proceedings of the rationalist society in Reason are very interesting to note for their approach towards rationalism:

Gopal spent half of one meeting exhorting them to begin their letters home with Hail, Cosmic Boson instead of the sacred syllable Om. Then they went through the epics and tried to find rational explanations for various magical events, objects and creatures. It was decided, for example, that the Sudarshan – chakra, the legendary wheel of fire, was actually an example of ancient fire works … the mythical clawed bird of the
Ramayana, Jatayu, was no early phantasm but merely one of the last surviving pterodactyls. \((\text{Reason 48})\)

Ghosh next moves on to tell how cotton trade between India and other countries in 1500 B.C. had a multicultural view. In those days, people traded transcending all narrow views. For them, trade was an entity of a multicultural world. They exchanged goods without any hindrance of national boundaries. Ghosh observes that trade and technology are not private entities. They both belong to the welfare of the humanity. Nowadays, many countries dominate over poor nations and exploit through technological and trade colonisation. Ghosh opposes this trend when he tells the history of cotton industry:

India first gave cotton, \textit{Gossypium indicus}, to the world. The cities of Indus valley grew cotton as early as 1500 B.C. But soon cotton was busy spinning its web around the world. It had King Sennacherib of Mesapotamia in its toils by 700 BC, and before long it had found its way to Herodotus in Greece. It travelled eastwards more slowly, but its conquest were no smaller in magnitude.\((\text{Reason 56})\).

This exchange of knowledge, expertise and resources is an essential feature of universal humanism. Ghosh says that even language serves immensely in creating a sense of accommodation and kinship. While explaining the various terms used for cotton in various countries, Ghosh says that across the continent, people do not differ much in their terminologies. “In Sanskrit it was called \textit{Karpasia}, in Persian \textit{Kirpas}. In Greek it was \textit{Carbasos}, and in Latin \textit{Carbasus}. They gave Hebrew its \textit{Kirpas}” \((\text{Reason 56})\). To
understand the world, Ghosh suggests that it is not just necessary to understand cotton, but to understand the polylinguistic history of cotton as well. It is essential to understand the migrant language of cloth in a multicultural context. Ghosh develops the idea that culture is a process of circulation that has nothing to do with national borders. Ghosh stresses the essence of multiculturalism, that is, appreciation, acceptance and promotion of multiple cultures based on respecting the diversities in a nation. He advocates the extending of equitable status to all distinct ethnic and religious groups without favouring the values of any specific ethnic, religious or cultural community as central.

In Lines, Amitav Ghosh recalls the incident which happened on 27 December 1963 that two hundred and sixty years after the Mu-I-Mubarak- believed to be a hair of the Prophet Mohammed- which was brought to Kashmir, was stolen. The newspaper reports, which the narrator reads, indicate that, in spite of this provocative theft “there was not one single recorded incident of animosity between Kashmiri Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs” (Lines 225). The purveyor of sanity was the wise leader Maulana Masoodi, “who persuaded the first demonstrators to march with black flags instead of green and thereby drew the various communities of Kashmir together in a collective display of mourning” (Lines 226).

Ghosh rightly regrets that in the communal hysteria that prevails in the subcontinent, the sane and secular Maulana Masoodi has been forgotten. It is the humanistic attitude of Maulana that had averted a bloodshed. Ghosh says that in a communally polarized world of the modern times, such attitudes seldom prevail. According to the notion of Universal Humanism, Ghosh advocates that borders
circumscribing religion, class, caste and creed should be ignored at least in spirit. Ghosh conveys the idea that multiculturalism is a fair system that allows people to truly express who they are within the cultural framework of the society which is more tolerant. He argues that culture is not one definable thing based on one race or religion, but rather the result of multiple factors that change as the world changes. C. James Trotman in the ‘Introduction’ of his book *Multiculturalism: Roots and Realities* argues:

Multiculturalism is valuable because it uses several disciplines to highlight neglected aspects of our social histories … and promotes respect for the dignity of the lives and voices of the forgotten. By closing gaps and by raising consciousness about the past, multiculturalism tries to restore a sense of wholeness in a postmodern era that fragments human life and thought. (ix)

Borders, then, are an illusion, cruel, most of the times. Tha’mma in *Lines* cannot understand “…how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality” (*Lines* 155). Men set up borders in order to exclude, national, cultural, racial and communal others, but Ghosh’s theme makes it clear that these are mental constructs and the lines on the maps are shadow lines.

Traversing borders becomes almost an obsession with Ghosh. Journeys then are meant to obliterate borders. When Tha’mma says that there are no visible borders, the narrator’s father tells her that in the modern world “the border is not on the frontier, it’s right inside the airport” (*Lines* 155). Ila wonders why people cannot take the world as it is. Because, Ghosh seems to answer that there is no such world, no reality that one does
not construct, and in so constructing, one interweaves one’s lives and one’s narrative with those of others.

Similarly, multiculturalism advances the idea that the lives of the characters in *Lines* are determined largely by their idea of freedom and that this idea is, in its turn, shaped by the history of the times. Ghosh explores political freedom through Tha’mma. Tha’mma, the narrator’s grandmother, is a product of bygone era. She is an independent woman, on whom history has conferred a faith in the sanctity of political freedom. Political freedom has been the single denominated force in her life. Tha’mma tells the narrator that “... years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood. War is their religion. That’s what it takes to make a country” (*Lines* 23). Here Ghosh advocates Universal Humanism, in an era where war is very often an enforced necessity for some nations.

A specific concern for human freedom and dignity in Ghosh’s understanding of humanism emerges from his rejection of colonial practice. Moreover, the concept of the equality of all human beings irrespective of their nationality, religion, caste, culture or social and political status gains supreme significance in Ghosh’s humanistic views.

Within the context of Bakhtin and Bhabha’s recommendation to jettison the binarisms of nationalism, Tridib in *Lines* can be seen to occupy a space which makes him think beyond the exclusions that officially sanctioned national boundaries create. Tridib seems to yearn for a world without boundaries. Tridib, the man who had exerted a formative influence on the narrator’s life, thus tells him the story of Tristan, a story of a hero who “was a man without a country, who fell in love with a woman-across-the-seas”
(Lines 183). This, of course, is also Tridib’s story, and the narrator’s too. It is a story that expresses a nostalgia for a world where immigration and customs officials do not exist, one does not lose one’s faith in “the stillness of the earth” (Lines 200). Here, Ghosh’s imagination and cross-cultural identification enable him to think beyond frontier limits.

But, as the narrator of Lines discovers, the people of India can no longer recognise a world without borders or a settled world, for diaspora has become their lot. They have, therefore, become fearful, aware “that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits can become suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood” (Lines, 200). Therefore, the uncle of the narrator’s grandmother refuses to move from his home, for as far as he can see, “once you start moving you never stop” (Lines 211).

Lines is a fictional critique on discreet cultures and the associated ideology of nationalism. The reality is the complex web of relationships between people that cut across nations and across generations. Ghosh celebrates the indivisible sanity that “binds people to each other independently of their governments” (Lines 231). Echoing this idea, the narrator, after the, trip to Pakistan, looks at Tridib’s old Atlas and measures the distances between nations with a compass. He realises that the space in between the nations in the Atlas has nothing to do with cognitive and cultural space:

They had drawn their borders, believing in that pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting
tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland… there had never been a moment in the 4000 year old history of that map when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines. (Lines 233-34)

Ghosh conveys the idea that today nationalism once conceived as a form of freedom, is really destroying the world. It is destroying the forms of ordinary life and prevents the development of free exchange between people.

Ghosh drives home the idea that hybridity and multiculturalism have become essential features of our world today. In this world, cultural amalgamation could become an effect antidote for the ills of religious fundamentalism and economic imbalance which very often break the fabric of democratic idealism. The reason for connecting the Datta-Chowdhory family in Calcutta and the Price family in London through friendship, love and marriage in Lines is to underscore the importance and necessity of multiculturalism. Here, the narrator switches between the two cities, as the Datta-Chowdarys move across the world on diplomatic postings. Ghosh’s theme allows this movement to be totally natural for the entire world like migratory birds need to come home annually and move away when necessary.

Subsequently, the English family plays an essential role in Ghosh’s attempt to subvert the previously dominant view. Instead of portraying them as off-spring of the aggressive imperialist power, Ghosh takes a compassionate and humane view towards them and incorporates them into his own and his nation’s history. Through this, Ghosh affirms that real existence is the maturity of coming to terms with the amalgam that has
come to constitute multiculturalism. This idea of multiculturalism is echoed in Stephan Alter’s article “Writing Between Cultures” where he says that “The cages in which writers were once confined have now been sprung open. Essentially the problem of alienation is less acute today, because the world is so much more complex, so polyglot, so full of competing voices, that most writers have become nations into themselves” (13).

The narrator ponders the deadly effects of borders, when Tridib, is killed in a communal violence. Tridib is struck by the fact that the bonds that link Dhaka and Calcutta are closer than ever: “Each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free – our looking – glass border” (Lines 234). Shadow lines are more than just the borders constructed by hegemony. These lines are the demarcation that separate human beings in the name of cultural parochialism. Apart from lamenting over the demonstration of the porousness of geographical borders, Ghosh highlights the artificiality of the binary categorisations of culture in the name of colonisation. Subsequently, Ghosh, underscores the need for the erosion of culturally constructed borders in favour of a broader humanism.

In Lines, Ghosh uses the portioning of the Bose family house in Dhaka to suggest the futility of drawing boundaries in order to deal with the problem of communalism, which is a major hindrance towards the formation of universal humanism. Ghosh emphasises the absurdity of partition through the wall constructed in the house thus separating Tha’mma and her uncle Jethamoshai. The ancestral house is divided down into the smallest possible portion which even cuts a lavatory in half, “bisecting an old commode” (Lines 123). After the dividing wall is put up, Tha’mma, to amuse her
younger sister, invents stories about her uncle’s house on the other side of the wall. The unseen side of the house becomes a daily source of fascination for the girls, gradually becoming known as the “upside-down house” (*Lines* 125). Significantly, when Tha’mma visits her uncle years later, she discovers that his house is no more different than hers. Through this event Ghosh disrupts the logic of partition that borders serve to mark out actual differences, “that across the border there existed another reality” (*Lines* 219). Here, Ghosh uses the house as a metaphor for nation and culture.

Ghosh, through the division of the ancestral house, suggests that apart from division, both sides are similar in terms of culture, humanism and brotherhood. Ghosh conveys the idea that Hindu – Muslim conflict is an offshoot of partition. Earlier Hindus and Muslims were living in harmony. With partition, all on a sudden, they proclaimed enmity against each other. In exploring the source of Hindu – Muslim violence in contemporary India, Sudhir Kakar in *The Colours of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion and Conflict* observes that “while religion is a matter of personal faith and reverence for a particular set of icons, rituals and dogmas, communalism evokes one’s excessive attachment to his or her community combined with an active hostility against other communities which share its geographical and political space” (13). So it is the dynamics of difference in the act of partition, as emphasised by Kakar that had allowed the nations of India and Pakistan to come into being. The overarching identities such as ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ have reinforced by Partition of India and today are highly charged terms. This charged atmosphere in India and Pakistan continues to set Muslims against Hindus, by playing them off as each other’s ‘other’. The fact is that partition and the
consequent polarisation of violence have become a recurring motif in the subsequent history of the sub-continent. Ghosh conveys through Robi that “you know, if you look at the pictures on the front pages of the newspapers at home now, all those pictures of dead people in Assam, the north-east, Punjab, Sri Lanka, Tripura – people shot by terrorists and separatists and the army and the police” (Lines 246).

Through such observations, Ghosh constantly stresses the need for universal humanism, which offers itself as an answer to a society to be free from religious parochialism. That is, religious intolerance is one of the causes for the unmaking of a multicultural society with universal brotherhood as an entity. In Lines this is powerfully demonstrated when the communal riots of 1964 break out in Calcutta, and the narrator’s best friend, Mansur, is overnight transformed into an enemy, the Muslim other, by his Sikh and Hindu classmates. Boundaries are thus made to assert a difference between the self and the other. After the partition is enacted, people emphasize the difference between themselves and the newly formed ‘outsiders’, in a process of demonising the ‘other’. Ghosh says that this ideology of difference is another hurdle for the realisation of universal brotherhood. This ideology of difference then becomes so instilled in people’s psyche and in the culture of the community that while the disputes may long be forgotten, people carry the partition walls in the minds.

This is clearly evident in Land, which is a converging point of various cultures. Ghosh in Land describes himself as a traveller interested in people, places and scenery. Ghosh seems to think that travel is man’s primordial quest to expand his awareness into realisation. This is the reason for him in tracing the history of a Jewish merchant, Ben
Yiju from Egypt, who spent two decades in Mangalore and his relationship with Indian slave Bomma, who worked for him as a business representative in Aden in the twelfth century A.D. One finds civilisations meeting, crossing and getting merged with one another. Ghosh creates a new cultural space highlighting the importance of heterogeneity. S. Renato Rosaldo argues in *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* that “in contrast with the classic view, which posits culture as a self-contained whole made up of coherent patterns, culture can arguably be conceived as a more porous array of intersections where distinct process cross from within and beyond its borders” (20).

The characters in *Land* are not a part of particular cultures, but they move within various cultural spaces and times. By highlighting the borderlessness of the ancient world, Ghosh ironically comments on the cultural divide that rules and ruins the modern world. For him, it is colonialism that has put an end to the selfless relationship that existed between the Egyptian master Ben Yiju and his Indian slave Bomma in the *Land*. It is certain that Bomma is very close to his master and is more of a companion and partner to him than a slave.

Whatever the circumstances of their meeting, the terms under which Bomma enters Ben Yiju’s service is entirely different from those suggested by the word slavery today: “their arrangement was probably more than of patron and client than master and slave” (*Land* 259). Ghosh provides an insight into how the flourishing trade between India and the Middle East and the rest of the world came to a sad end with the coming of the Portuguese. He refers to the arrival of the Portuguese and Vasco-de-Gama, its first representative on May 17, 1498. Once the Portuguese resorted to the use of military
force to take control over trade in the Indian Ocean, a new era had begun in world history: “The remains of the civilization that had brought Ben Yiju to Mangalore were devoured by that unquenchable, demonic thirst that has raged ever since over five hundred years over the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf” (Land 286).

Ghosh explains how those divisions, the walls between human and human, are the result of a new cult that was introduced by the power hungry imperialist in the wake of colonisation – “the cult of science and tanks and guns and bombs” (Land 236). Once colonisation begins, hate and suspicion replaces what is “right or good or willed by God … for they belonged to a dismantled rung on the ascending ladder of Development (Land 237).

Ghosh, through the Ben Yiju narrative brings into fore the religious conscious world where cultures and lands connect to each other in the name of economic necessity. Ironically, it is the same economic exigencies of globalisation that have transcended national boundaries today. Yet the sense of intolerance and horror at the faiths other than those practiced by one’s own community seems to be growing. The Babri Masjid demolition and the Taliban’s destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan are some of the current examples for religious intolerance. In the article “A Meditation on History”, historian Vinay Lal rightly observes: “In a world that appears to be increasingly cosmopolitan, where distances have collapsed, where commodities violate boundaries with maddening impurity, our options have in fact narrowed, and the multiplicities of history with which the medieval world cohabited now all speak in univocal language” (8). In this context, Ghosh highlights that multiculturalism is necessary since it is the
form of integration, which fits the ideal of egalitarianism and is one of the best ways for transforming a violence ridden world. That is, cultural accommodation, which is associated with identity politics of difference and the politics of recognition could be a way out of this depressing abyss.

Ghosh’s post-colonial perspective is also evident in the way he portrays the pre-colonial times when there were no barriers between Abraham Ben Yiju, and Bomma in Land. The novel demonstrates powerfully how an excursion into the past is no escape from the present, but a coming to terms with the present realities of living. By juxtaposing the medieval and the modern worlds of the twelfth and twentieth centuries with their diverse cultures of Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism, Ghosh illustrates through his fictional discourse, the compelling cry for human understanding and religious tolerance. It is the immediate need of the world, which is torn apart by religious obscurantism and fanaticism.

The force of nationalism has become one of the most potent forces of our present time. There is an increasing number of emergent states and separatist movements all over the world. Ghosh in the interview “Lessons from the Twelfth Century” says that “it is often war that creates collusion between history and individuals lives. In circumstances of war as in such situations as revolution, mass evacuations, forced population movements and so on, nobody has the choice of stepping away from history” (53). People have moved in time and space and have become culturally and religiously commingled. Ghosh is of the view that in many cases this have become artificial, not only in the sense of being man-made but also in being inadequate – if they
unite one group along a certain criterion, they inevitably divide along another. In *Land* Ghosh attempts to construct the converging points of various cultures. Within the framework of the text it is evident that civilization meets, crosses and gets merged with one another. Thus in *Land*, a complex relationship with other nations is constructed, predominantly with the coloniser.

The reality is that most of the borders of the Third World countries were drawn up in this century, some by colonial powers and not by the sovereign nations themselves. Ghosh says in the interview ‘Lessons from the Twelfth Century,’ that “in the 12th century, people developed a much more sophisticated language of cultural negotiation than we know today. They were able to include different cultures in their lives, while maintaining what was distinct about themselves” (52).

Homi Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* posits that the modern nation “fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into language of metaphor” (139). Ghosh attempts to recover the historically situated lost, forgotten subjectivities of a group of traders and their servants who had trade relations extending from the African subcontinent to South Western India. By highlighting the borderlessness of the ancient world, Ghosh ironically comments on the cultural divide that rules the modern world. He implies that self centered colonialism has put an end to the possibility of the kind of relationship that existed between individuals as different as Ben Yiju and Bomma. He further adds: “The knell had been struck for the world that had brought Bomma, Ben Yiju and Ashu together, and another age had begun in which the crossing of the paths would seem so unlikely that its very possibility would all but
disappear from human memory” (*Land* 286). In such a context, hybridity and multiculturalism have become essential features of the world today. Ghosh, here breaks free the colonial narrative, thus rescuing literature from the limited spheres of nationalism and ethnicity.

The idea that intrigues Ghosh is the dynamic cultural amalgams in the twelfth century, a spirit that is no longer alive today, that enabled a Jewish trader “originally” from Tunisia to live in Egypt, Aden and Mangalore, participating in all realms of public life and engaging in trade without the notion of being of a different nationality. Ghosh conveys the idea that national borders are all too rigid today and so attempts to trace the process by which they became thus. With this quest in mind, he begins his journey in Egypt researching for his dissertation, and also with the story of Bomma pursuing him: “I knew nothing about the Slave of MS H.6 except that he had given me a right to be there, a sense of entitlement” (*Land*, 19). Bomma becomes his second self, the Indian in the Middle East eight hundred years ago, and the key to understanding, indeed re-writing, and his present.

Ghosh’s research sheds more light on the world of Ben Yiju. For example, Ghosh learns that the hybrid language, “Judeo-Arabic, is in fact very close to Arabic, the dialect used in the Egyptian Delta villages the author lived in, to be precise, except that it was transcribed in Hebrew characters” (*Land* 103-4). Also, the Eastern Jews use the same name for God as do the Muslims, Allah. Thus, people of different backgrounds lived in harmony rather than in the forced uniformity that is known today. Indeed, they create their own crossbred cultures as a product of such commingling.
In *Land*, Ghosh attempts to recover the forgotten history of medieval Indian Ocean trade, the world of accommodation that has been obscured by the map of modern knowledge. This recovery is undertaken in order to challenge the exclusive national identities. Ghosh also attacks the offences committed by religious parochialism which very often contradicts cultural relativism. In a spirit of humility, Ghosh attempts to gain the friendship of the villagers in Lataifa in Egypt to understand their beliefs and customs. As a part of it, he engages in a discussion on religious customs with one Uster Mustafa. Immediately, Mustafa attempts to introduce Ghosh to Islam – “Now that you are here among us, you can understand and learn about Islam, and then you can make up your mind whether you want to stay within that religion of yours” (*Land* 48). Even though Mustafa becomes his friend later, Ghosh is surprised to see how religious Mustafa is. A similar discussion takes place in another village Nashawy. This time it is about the Hindu custom of cremation and veneration of cows. Again, Ghosh meets with the intolerant response that “you should civilise your people. You should tell them to stop praying to cows and burning their dead” (*Land* 126). This sense of Egyptian wonder at Indian rituals stems from cultural cocooning. Ghosh is of the view that such myopic and narrow mindednesses are the hindrances for a multicultural society. These meetings made apparent that the boundaries in question are not national but more deeply religious. While contrasting this animosity with the mutual respect and love during the period of Ben Yiju and Bomma, Ghosh eulogises the family ties that flourished between peoples and says that it is culture and not conquest that linked the societies during the twelfth century.
Another marker of cultural connection in twelfth century is language. The Arabic word for ‘sugar’ is derived from the sanskrit word “sukkar”, while the Hindi term is ‘misri’ which is derived from ‘Masr’, the old Arabic name for Egypt. Ghosh observes that such intercommunity transactions flourished entirely beyond the influence of the west and were systematically destroyed by western imperialism.

Ghosh, makes *Land* a successful example of a new type of ethnographic fiction seeking to sever ties with the traditional ethnographic tradition. Alluding to this aspect, James Clifford in his article “Looking for Bomma” observes: “In weaving together his modern and medieval histories, Ghosh crosses the borders of ethnographic writing, particularly that shared with the novel and travel literature” (27). Ghosh’s research sheds more light on the world of multiculturalism and cultural accommodation as far as language is concerned. Here Judo-Arabic language and Hebrew are culturally and linguistically connected.

At the same time, everyone who wrote Judo-Arabic had a thorough knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, and though they were not usually able to use Hebrew as a language of expression, they were well able to quote in it: “Thus their prose is studded with Hebrew proverbs and long passages from Bible, as well as legal and religious terms from the archaic language Aramaic” (*Land* 103). Conveniently, in the twelfth century A.D., people of different backgrounds lived in unison rather than in the forced uniformity today.

Ghosh juxtaposes this cultural accommodation with today’s intolerance. He is in for another shock when he finds that his visit to the shrine of Jewish Saint Sidi abu-
Hasira turns out to be a cause for suspicion. When he tries to explain that his purpose in visiting the Saint’s tomb was just curiosity, the man interrogating him is even more mystified: “But you’re not Jewish or Israeli” he said, “You’re Indian – what connection could you have with the tomb of a Jewish holy man, here in Egypt?” (Land 339). Ghosh observes that the Egyptian cannot understand how an Indian could have any interest in a Jewish shrine. Ghosh is baffled because the culture to which he belongs cannot conceive of a shrine as being a place of historical or spiritual interest for him. The shrine is strictly within its religious parameters. In a multicultural point of view it is worthwhile to mention that Hindus pray at the shrines of Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti at Ajmer, Hazarat Nizamuddin Aulia in Delhi and Babar Mosque at Erumely on the way to Sabarimala.

When the man at the shrine questions Ghosh, he thinks of telling the story of Ben and Bomma:

For an instant I even thought of telling him the story of Bomma and Ben Yiju. But then it struck me, suddenly, that there was nothing I could point to within his world that might give credence to my story – the remains of those small, indistinguishable, intertwined histories, Indian and Egyptian, Muslim and Jewish, Hindu and Muslim, had been partitioned long ago. (Land 339)

It is a stunning reminder that two individuals of different races from far off countries with diverse traditions, backgrounds and religions could indeed have had such a meaningful relationship. Ghosh observes that the modern Egyptian fails to understand Ghosh’s Hindu beliefs and rituals, labeling them barbaric, while Ben Yiju, a Jew of Arab
origin, had a Hindu family and friends. Ghosh, thus brings out the necessity of multiculturalism and universal humanism which were once a part of the trade link between India and Egypt and also gives importance to the centuries old culture of accommodation and acceptance. For him, the globalised trade today is controlled by aggression, which refuses any attempt at cooperation. The once peaceful traditions of oceanic trade were the products of a travelling culture that is a world away from those of colonial mercantilism and contemporary global capitalism.

Obviously, it can be seen that Ghosh gives importance to the humanist tradition. His dream is that of a human centered universe devoid of narrow mindedness and cultural parochialism. He believes in breaking down the artificial human made boundaries between nations and people and emphasises the oneness of humanity.

The idea of the need of universal humanism is again reiterated in *Palace*. Ghosh’s understanding of human values can be traced from the rejection of the authority of the imperial powers. Branding the colonised as inferior and barbaric, the imperialists very often imposes their culture in the name of civilisation. Ghosh, through *Palace* exposes the hollow nature of the pseudo humanistic concerns of the colonialists embodied in the protection of rights of women and their education. Uma in *Palace* brings out Ghosh’s perspective regarding the deceptive nature of this type of humanism presented by the colonialists. It is disturbing when Uma says about the reality: “How was it possible to imagine that one could grant freedom by imposing subjugation? That one could open a cage by pushing it inside a bigger cage? How could any section of a people
hope to achieve freedom where the entirety of a population was held in subjugation” (Palace 80).

Ghosh is of the view that such imperial ideas reveal the false sense of humanism propagated by the British authorities. He criticises this false sense of humanism employed to promote the interests of the dominating cultures through different practices. Ghosh’s idea is to reinforce the message that humanism is possible only through mutual respect, freedom and creating an atmosphere of multiculturalism.

Ghosh’s humanism rejects all forms of oppression. He is critical of those social and cultural practices that tend to subjugate people as human beings. His humanistic concerns are voiced by Dinu in Palace, who exposes the designs of power hungry people: “Their ideology is about the superiority of certain races and the inferiority of others” (Palace 293).

In order to reject the stable and fixed concept of identity, Ghosh presents his characters that do not carry essential identities. Instead of being Indians, Burmese or Malay, these characters are remembered as Dolly, Uma, Rajkumar, Saya John, Alison, Dinu, Neel, etc. The two different names of Rajkumar’s sons – Neel and Dinu – one Burmese and other Indian, destabilise nation based identities. Here Ghosh’s perspective comes closer to an understanding of multiple possibilities of human existence that tends to make his humanistic concerns multidimensional, informing plurality of views and defining human values.

Uma, in Palace, initially considers the strategies employed by the Empire as something humane and the result of their concern for bringing of civilisation to a dark
world. But, at a later stage when a popular insurgent movement rebels, the rebellion is ruthlessly crushed by the British rulers. She then realises the hollow claims of their humanism and observes that the Empire is “so skillful and ruthless in its deployment of its overwhelming power, so expert in the management of opinion” (Palace 254). Uma’s realisation is a show of a specific concern for human freedom and dignity in Ghosh’s rejection of colonial practices. The concept of equality of all human beings irrespective of their nationality, religion and culture gains significance in Ghosh’s humanistic convictions.

This awareness of true humanistic concerns makes it clear to Uma that not only the British, but even some natives are in no way different when they indulge in oppressive activities, thus working against the spirit of humanity. Uma embodies Ghosh’ criticism of people like Rajkumar who provided indentured labour to the British rulers: “Rajkumar, you’re in no position to offer opinions. It’s people like you who’re responsible for this tragedy. Did you ever think of the consequences when you were transporting people here? What you and your kind have done is far worse than the worst deeds of the Europeans” (Palace 247).

In Ghosh’s understanding, one major element threatening humanistic values today is power politics. The intrusion of politics into different fields of life tends to marginalise humanistic concerns. The working power politics does not allow the social and cultural institutions to work for human dignity. Instead of being the centre, human is subordinated to the level of a means to serve the ends of those at power that controls different institutions. In Palace, Aung San Suu Kyi, who struggles to uphold democratic values
and universal humanism against the tyrannical rule of the military junta, is presented as an embodiment of true humanism. Upholding the dignity of human as human, she resists the involvement of politics that blocks the way to human independence. In the words of Dinu in *Palace* “[Aung San Suu Kyi] 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” (*Palace* 542).

Similarly for Ghosh, the institution of marriage can be a way for crossing boundaries. Rajkumar, a Bengali immigrant to Rangoon, falls in love with Dolly, one of the handmaidens of Queen Supalayat, and marries her. Similarly, Saya John’s son Mathew falls in love with an American girl Elso, though he is a Burmese. Mathew’s Burmese antecedents are in no way an impediment to his marriage with Lisa. Alison is Burmese – American and Dinu is Burmese – Indian. While Alison is Christian, Dinu is Hindu – Buddhist. Dinu and Alison fall in love with each other but could not get married because Alison shoots herself rather than fall into the hands of the marauding Japanese. Similarly, Rajkumar’s elder son Neel falls in love with Manju, Uma’s niece. He is half Burmese from his mother Dolly’s side and Manju is a Bengali. Rajkumar’s another son Dinu marries a Burmese woman Ma Thin Aye, who is a writer and a university professor.

All these relationships demonstrate how the differences between Burmese, Indians and Americans become insignificant in the face of the universal compulsions of love and companionship. Such blended relationships assert the idea of multiculturalism and universal humanism. They also underline the overpowering nature of man-woman
relationship. Here race, religion, class and creed are overridden by the drives of mutual love and understanding.

Ghosh’s characters stay outside the purview of national identity and accommodate one another within the diaspora community. This erasure of national identities builds new homes. Ghosh’s community avoids all constructed modern identities and is a Utopian one. The strength of this community is that the members are naturally bound together through shared human values. The community is devoid of ideological and physical violence. The progress and emancipation of human is delineated not in material or corporal forms, but in ethical terms. Ghosh’s vision and perception of the modern world viewed from Palace presents the possibility of a human world, irrespective of class, colour and creed.

Similarly in Tide, Ghosh underscores the need for universal humanism. The colonial settler Daniel Hamilton in the Sundarbans embodies this spirit. Hamilton’s dream is to develop the backward community by providing the essential necessities to the natives. Rewriting the history in fiction, Ghosh narrates Hamilton’s benevolent outlook in having acquired ten thousand acres of the land in the tide country from the British in 1903, to set up a community undivided by caste, religion, ethnicity and nationality. Hamilton has a cosmopolitan outlook: “He wanted to build a place where no one would exploit anyone and people would live together without petty social distinctions and differences. He dreamed of a place where men and woman could be farmers in the morning, poets in the afternoon and carpenters in the evening” (Tide 53).
The humanistic approach of Ben Yiju towards Bomma in *Land* is re enacted in *Tide*. It is seen that Hamilton’s approach towards the people of the tide country is based on universal humanism. Hamilton provides electricity with a huge generator, installs telephone, and establishes a Central Bank in Gobasa, which it is a model of his imagination. Alok Rai in the article “Saga of Morichjhapi” conveys that “Hamilton’s is a sort of Nehruvian ambition, to make a place where people would shed their atavistic baggage of custom and prejudice and avail the blessing of modernity” (64).

Thus, the colonial settler Hamilton’s utopian dream of establishing an egalitarian society in the Sundarbans is appreciable when he says, “By the thousand everyone who was willing to work was welcome, Daniel said, but on one condition. They could not bring all their petty little divisions and differences. Here there would be no Brahmins or Untouchables, no Bengalis and no Oriyas. Everyone would have to live and work together” (*Tide* 52-3).

Hamilton echoes Ghosh’s conviction that in spite of the colonial attitude of the British, there could be a Hamilton who is a saga of universal brotherhood. Ghosh conveys that amidst any kind of setbacks and narrow mindedness, universal humanism has its place in any trying situation.

The living world of folklore is intertwined by Ghosh in highlighting the need for religious syncretism. This impulse manifests in the curious tale of Bon Bibi, the Muslim deity of forest. The cult of Bon Bibi has been handed down through generations, by means of the oral tradition of story and song as told by a native Abdul Rahim in “The Miracles of Bon Bibi or the Narrative of Her Glory” (*Tide* 354). Bob Bibi episode, for
Ghosh is a signifier of the importance of religious amity. The tide people are Hindu, and have ended up in India rather than in East Pakistan. But that does not prevent them from absorbing substantial elements from the adjacent world of Islam. According to the folklore, the twins, Bon Bibi and her brother are born in Medina to a sufi akir. They are marked out for a special destiny:

When the twins came of age, the archangel brought them word that they had been chosen for a divine mission: they were to travel from Arabia to ‘the country of eighteen tides’ – in order to make it fit for human habitation. Thus charged, Bob Bibi and Shah Jongoli set off for the mangrove forests of Bengal dressed in the simple robes of Sufi mendicants. (*Tide* 103)

The Hindus of Sundarban, worship the deity, Bon Bibi. For them Bon Bibi’s ancestry is not a hurdle in the path of worship. The interesting thing to note is that the people of the Sundarbans perform Hindu rituals in front of a Muslim deity chanting Muslim prayers. The Muslim are not image worshippers. But here it can be seen that Muslims perform Hindu rituals and also simultaneously chant ‘Allah’:

Piya recognized a refrain that occurred over and over again – it contained a word that sounded like ‘Allah’. She had not thought to speculate about Fokir’s religion, but it occurred to her now that he might be Muslim. But no sooner had she thought this, than it struck her that a Muslim was hardly likely to pray to an image like this one. What Fokir was performing
looked very much like her mother’s Hindu pujas – and yet the words seemed to suggest otherwise. *(Tide 152)*

Through this event, Ghosh brings out the harmonious co-existence of Islamic faith and Hindu rituals pointing to a transcultural fusion of elements from both Hinduism and Islam. Ghosh brings together diverse elements of two religions. It is worthwhile to mention that the rituals performed to a Muslim God are from Hindu tradition: “First they fetched some leaves and flowers and placed them in front of the images. Then standing before the shrine, Fokir began to recite some kind of chant with his head bowed and his hands joined in an attitude of prayer” *(Tide 157)*. Usually, Muslims pray with their hands wide open. But here Fokir prays in front of Bon Bibi with folded hands. The ritual prayer to Bon Bibi is a queer mix of Hinduism and Islam. Image worship is heretical to Islam. But in the Sunderbans it is accepted as long as Bon Bibi saves the people from the hands of the demon Dokkhin Rai. The strange prayer begins with Bismillah, even though the rhythm of the oral recitation is that of Bangla Ramayana. This method of worship, for Ghosh is proof of the co-existence of religions. In an era of Hindu – Muslim conflicts over flippant issues, such insights into the folklore of Bon Bibi asserts the necessity of religious tolerance and multiculturalism.

Ghosh observes that in the Sundarbans the spirit of unity has become a binding force in a land inhabited by people of difference religions. Thus, Bon Bibi, the local legend fuses the Hindu and the Islamic mythologies and recalls the saying ‘Unity in Diversity’. As this legend has become the be-all and end-all of the breath of the people of Sundarbans, there is no communal ill-will. Here Ghosh expresses his concern for
religious tolerance. He conveys the fact that religion should not be a divisive force, but a unifying force. In other words, the world will be prosperous and peaceful only when the walls of religions and races are pulled down.

Ghosh rediscovers that the story of Bon Bibi, that was almost unknown outside the Sundarbans, and conveys the lived experience of those who inhabit the mangrove forest. The novel depicts travelling theatre companies that go from village to village, staging passionate re-enactments of the legend. The verse narrative is recited every time the worship of Bon Bibi is celebrated. Although these rituals are in Hindu form, they begin with the Muslim invocation ‘Bismillah’. In a region where several hundred people are annually killed by predators, no person ever ventures into the forest without invoking the protection of Bon Bibi. The most important of the belief that relates to Bon Bibi is a call for a regulation of human need. Bon Bibi legend is at bottom, a parable about the destructiveness of human greed. Its fundamental teaching is that the relationship between the environment and human beings should be harmoniously maintained. Ghosh is of the view that the forest must never be entered except in circumstances of demonstrable need.

Ghosh in the Bon-Bibi episode stresses the need for environmental preservation also. It brings out Ghosh’s vision about the relationship between human beings and natural world. Similar concepts of ecological balance, reverence for nature and control of greed can also be seen in this relationship.

The oneness of existence is once again reiterated in Ghosh’s Poppies, where people of various nationalities journey in the ship Ibis as a part of their job in poppy trade that is imposed on them by the East India Company. To Ghosh, Ibis is a microcosm of a
world where one can see the co-existence of people from different nationalities and walks of life. Even though they suffer at the hands of the cruel captain Chillingworth, in suffering they relate with one another in terms of love and friendship. To convey the need of universal humanism, Ghosh, thus brings together a group of characters of different races and nationalities hailing from all strata of society. There is the British captain Chillingworth, the American, Zachary Reid, Indian troops of coolies, crew, the labourers from France and China, convicts and aristocrats, Hindus, Christians and Buddhists add to a multicultural identity in the ship.

Rajan Neel Ratan, a bankrupt Rajah finds solace in the company of one Ah Fatt, who is the son of a Parsi father and Chinese mother. A strong bond develops between the two, something that would have been inconceivable, had they been in their respective countries. Ghosh’s Deeti conveys the idea that “they were all kin now, their rebirth in the ship’s womb had made them into a single family” (Poppies 432).

Ghosh delineates the need for mutual love, acceptance and accommodation through the co-existence of people from various parts of the world in a ship. Ecka Nack, a tribesman marries Heeru, who is from the plains. Similarly, disregarding the communal and class differences, Jodu, a Muslim, falls in love with Munia, a non-Muslim. Similarly an alliance is forged between Zachary, a half–black, half-white American with a French lady Paulette, who is brought up by a Muslim nurse. Ghosh points out here that shared experiences nurture as many similarities and differences. In an interview with Amrita Tripati in CNNIBN Ghosh remarks:
One of the most wonderful things that happened historically with Indian indentured labourers as they went to other countries abroad was that when they were in the ship they began to think of themselves as jahaz bhais (ship brothers). So once they would settle in Mauritius or wherever, that relationship between them continued as they continued to think of themselves as jahas bhais. So it became a family, not a natural family but as it was a family of accidents. In a way I found that concept to be very beautiful when I first came across it, so that was in a way the inspiration of the book. (1)

Subsequently, Ghosh uses the journey as a path to self discovery. Ghosh advocates a human centered world devoid of caste, creed, race, sex and religion. He emphasises the breaking down of the artificial boundaries between nations and people and highlights the need for universal humanism. He insists that these artificial barriers can be transcended through all embracing love for humankind. Ghosh points out the need of oneness of humanity and human solidarity when he makes Paulette remark “on a boat of pilgrims, no one can lose caste and everyone is the same: it’s like taking a beat to the temple of Jagannath, in Puri. From now on and forever afterwards, we will all be ship siblings-jahaz-bhais and jahaz bahens – to each other. Their will be no differences between us” (Poppies 356).

This sense of comradeship of an Italian, that too mentioning the pilgrimage to Jagannath temple makes Deeti immensely happily:
In the glow of the moment, she did something she would never have done otherwise: she reached out to take the strangers’ hand in her own. Instantly, in emulation of her gesture, every other woman reached out too, to share in this communion of touch. Yes, said Deeti, from now on, there are no differences between us; we are jahaz-bhai and jahaz-bahen to each other; all of us children of the ship. (Poppies 356)

This notion of mutual love and respect makes others accept the need for co-existence. Ghosh conveys the need for commonalities that exist beyond class, race and culture, thus bringing together the necessity of universal humanism. Alluding to this view, critic Dasan in The Rain and the Roots: The Indian English Novel Then and Now remarks that Ghosh offers “vivid glimpses of intertwined histories with a subversive or subaltern dimension packed with anecdotes, symbolic meaning and extraordinary range of characters. The effortless passage of his characters through Asia, Europe and America is a metaphor for connecting people emotionally” (83).

In Poppies, Ghosh’s preoccupation with the commitment for a broadly defined secular humanistic frame of values is laid open. This secular humanistic frame of values underlines the humanistic ideas of compassion love and tolerance. This could be possible through the idea of multiculturalism which teaches the citizens of a democratic society to value diversity and difference, helping to integrate diverse cultures into the larger society without severing themselves.

Similarly, the secular humanist view of Ghosh is visible in Count and his argument against nuclearisation of the sub continent. To Ghosh, as like any thinking
Indian, India-Pakistan relations have always been intriguing. He wants to have a first hand experience of people’s expression. He says:

I wanted to hear them for myself. What I heard instead was for the most part of a strange mixture of psychologising, grandiose fantasy and cynicism, allied with the deliberate conjuring up of illusory threats and imaginary fears. The truth is that India’s nuclear program is status driven, not threat driven…. In Pakistan’s case too the motivation behind the nuclear program … is parity with India. The pursuit of nuclear weapons in the sub continent is the moral equivalent of civil war: the targets the rulers have in mind for that weapons are, in the end, none other than their own people.

(Count106)

Ghosh is severe against attitudes that engender extreme animosity, abhorrence and suspicion between these two neighbouring countries. To him, the politicians who speak to avert every future crisis also simultaneously build an atmosphere of war and hatred for the neighbouring nations.

Similarly, Ghosh in the essay “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi” in the collection Imam reiterates the need for religious amity. By citing the anti-Sikh riot associated with the assassination of Indira Gandhi, Ghosh observes that it is the religious intolerance coupled with frenzy that is responsible for such carnage. It is therefore imperative to have a society, which is not hostile to other religions. Ghosh, who was a witness to anti-Sikh riots, narrates some incidents which highlight the role played by those who occupy the narrow corridors of religious fanaticism. To substantiate the need of multiculturalism
and religious tolerance, Ghosh narrates an event which happened in the life of his Sikh
neighbours.

This incident, which happened in Ghosh’s friend Hari Sen’s house speaks volumes about the importance of brotherhood and tolerance. An elderly Sikh family resides near Hari Sen’s house. On the fateful day, a mob shouting anti-Sikh slogans comes towards the house of the Sikh family, the Bawas. The elderly couple, with the help of their Hindu cook manages to cross the compound and enters into Hari Sen’s house: “Their cook was with them, and it was with his assistance that they made it over the wall. The cook who was Hindu, then returned to the house to stand guard” (*Imam* 54). Meanwhile, Mrs. Sen received the Sikh family and shelters them: “Mrs. Sen greeted the elderly couple with folded hands as they came in” (*Imam* 54).

Meantime, the mob reaches the front of Bawas’ house which is guarded by the cook. “The cook was very frightened. He was surrounded by thugs thrusting knives in his face and shouting questions … wasn’t it true, they shouted, that his employers were Sikhs? Where were they? Where they hiding inside” (*Imam* 55).

The cook, without losing his heart, says that his employers who are Sikhs are now away. “Yes, he said yes, his employers were Sikhs, but they’d left town; there was no one in the house. No, the house didn’t belong to them; they were renting from a Hindu” (*Ghosts* 55). The Hindu cook succeeds in persuading the thugs. Ghosh, meantime enters into the drawing room of the Sen’s, where he sees a heartrending scene. Ghosh says: “My memory of what I saw in the drawing room is uncannily vivid. Mrs. Sen had a smile on her face as she poured a cup of tea for Mr. Bawa” (*Imam* 55).
Ghosh believes that this domestic incident should become the microcosm of a society devoid of religious hatred and intolerance. Here, the Hindu family does not think about the religion while giving shelter to the Sikhs. Instead, with a broader view of goodwill they uphold the need of humanism in a world which lacks it.

Another incident, which Ghosh cites regarding the importance of goodwill and brotherhood is the saving of a Sikh passenger in a Delhi bus on the fateful day. Here again, Ghosh is a witness to the incident which, he says, should be emulated by all in such trying circumstances, thus paving the way for a world free from religious prejudices.

While travelling in the bus, the passengers see “red-eyed young men in half-unbuttoned shirts” approaching the bus. By seeing them, a woman in the bus alerts the only Sikh passenger. Ghosh narrates:

A stout woman in a sari sitting across the aisle from me was the first to understand what was going on. Rising to her feet, she gestured urgently at the Sikh who was sitting hunched in his seat. She hissed at him in Hindi, telling him to get down and keep out of sight. The man started in surprise and squeezed himself into the narrow foot space between the seats.

(Imam 49)

Meanwhile, the mob arrives and asks the passengers whether there are any Sikhs in the bus. The driver says, there are no Sikh passengers in the bus. Ghosh says that a single doubt in the mind of the mob will lead to a massacre. But nobody reveal anything:
A few rows ahead of me, the crouching, turbaned figure had gone completely still. Outside, some of the young men were jumping up to look through the windows, asking if there were any Sikhs on the bus.

No someone said, and immediately other voices picked up the refrain soon all the passengers were shaking their heads and saying, No, no, let us go now, we have to get home. (Imam 49-50)

Ghosh conveys the idea that differences between people exist not necessarily due to the disparity between cultures, but as much because of religious boundaries. In many societies like India, the differences between one culture and another is far more than the difference between one religion and other. Ghosh’s vision and perception of the modern world presents the possibility of a human world, irrespective of class and creed. The strength of Ghosh’s community presented in his works is that its members are naturally bound to one another through shared common human values with mutual love and understanding.